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# GRAMOPHONE SOUNDS OF AMERICA

**RECORDINGS & EVENTS** A special eight-page section for readers in the US and Canada

GRAMOPHONE talks to...

# Nancy Ellen Ogle, soprano...

...on Dear Darwin, the song-cycle written for her by Scott Brickman

# How did this 'abecedarium' - 26 songs, one for each letter of the alphabet - arise?

I teach at the University of Maine, which is the home of the National Poetry Foundation. Kathleen Ellis, whose poetry was set by Scott Brickman for this collection, has connections with the foundation. The year 2009 was a big one for Darwin and I went to some anniversary events, most of which were very sombre and serious. Then I came across Kathleen's poems inspired by Darwin, and they just spoke on a whole different level. What she's doing is looking at Darwin as an archetype of the modern man; how he was so thoughtful in his perception of the world and yet when he said what he thought he was ridiculed. That irony of the human condition is what Kathleen captures - what it's like to say what you think and what can come back to you as a result.

# How did Brickman become involved?

I first sang a piece of his 20 years ago which dealt with some very abstract poetry. It's been interesting to see his music become more accessible over the years, yet it still has deep integrity. I told Scott about Kathleen's Darwin poetry and he said he wanted to write something for me. He was surprised at how fast the poems rolled into music for him.

### Why was he the ideal composer for this?

I find the poems so unexpected and witty – I have to slow down when I read them just to take them in. Take 'A is for Apple' – you might think of a children's song but look at the opening lines: 'The letter A is an archer / a mark across the chest.' The ground has shifted, the reality is something different. Or 'Playing House': 'He plays a garden. / She plays a fruit tree...He plays the field. / She plays house.' Scott spreads these layers out with his own sense of humour and irony, and gives a bit of time to these fast poems.

# Brickman has said that five of the songs are 'American', with accompaniments deriving from Broadway and pop songs...

'Heart' is one of those, and I love it - it's got a great vibe. This is one of the songs I tell people to listen to first if they're new to this music.



'Quotidian Sunday' is another - it's so vocally gratifying, it's like singing an Italian aria.

# What does the poet make of the songs?

I've sung new music and the poet has come up afterwards looking puzzled, saying 'There was supposed to be a line break there'. But I think Scott's music gives this poetry an accessible life and a charming context. And Kathleen said recently that her poet friends thought the music brought out the poetry perfectly - I couldn't feel better about that!

# JS Bach · Pachelbel

JS Bach Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080<sup>a</sup>. Komm, süsser Tod, BWV478<sup>a</sup> Pachelbel Canon<sup>b</sup>. Chorale Preludes<sup>b</sup>. Chaconne<sup>b</sup> Barbara Harbach org

MSR Classics © ② MS1442 (148' • DDD)

Played on the Fisk organs of aDowntown United

Presbyterian Church, Rochester, NY; bSlee Hall at
the State University of Buffalo, NY

From Gasparo GSCD282/3



For many listeners besides scholars and (in this case) organists, the challenge with

Bach's The Art of Fugue is to hear good

music. The challenge for performers is simply to make good music. Scored for no instrument in particular, the music is long, the textures increasingly complicated and the tune which is fugued is not a happy one, though it may be uniquely amenable to Bach's inversions and other contrapuntal designs and devices. Barbara Harbach responded to the challenge in her 1989 recording for Gasparo by putting Bach's iconically simple yet complex voices and lines into motion, tempered by a certain amount of gravitational pull, interpretatively speaking, and letting the sound and authority of her Fisk tracker organ - Op 83 at the United Presbyterian Church in downtown Rochester - take over. A year later, on Fisk Op 95 at Lippes Concert Hall at the State

University of Buffalo, Harbach recorded a Johann Pachelbel set with considerably more freedom and sense of drama.

At the place in the score where Bach's uncompleted last fugue breaks off, Harbach stopped and let 16 heart-stopping seconds elapse on the track itself before moving on to the consoling strains of *Komm, süsser Tod*; these segued into a spiritually radiant (with audiophile low bass) reading of Pachelbel's famous Canon in the standard arrangement by S Drummond Wolff, and gripping performances of two big chaconnes, each one its own *tour de force* stretching harmonic and melodic orthodoxies with astounding virtuosity; to these Harbach responded with her most brilliant playing.

Laurence Vittes

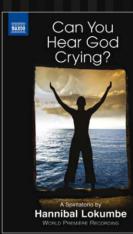
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And long after I have left this spectacular earth, I will be known by the tones that are left behind. My achievements to date are abundant, yet I hope pale in comparison to what lies ahead.

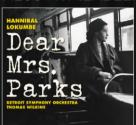
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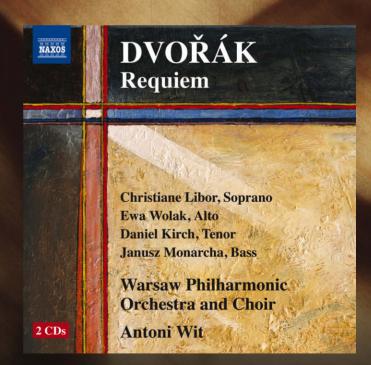


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# REQUIEM.

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# Beethoven

'A Beethoven Odvssev, Vol 3' Piano Sonatas - No 2, Op 2 No 2; No 17, 'Tempest', Op 31 No 2: No 26, 'Les adjeux', Op 81a James Brawn of

MSR Classics (F) MS1467 (71' • DDD)



The British pianist James Brawn is recording his way through the

32 Beethoven piano sonatas out of chronological order, which gives listeners a chance to hear the composer at different periods in his development in the genre. What unites the performances is Brawn's authoritative sense of shape and sonority. So far, his playing has been the epitome of lucidity, elegance and drama. There's every reason to expect that his complete set of the sonatas will be a triumphant achievement.

So is there any reason to read further in this review of 'A Beethoven Odyssey, Vol 3'? Perhaps to glean some of the distinctive qualities Brawn brings to each sonata. The earliest here is the Sonata No 2 (Op 2 No 2), an example of Beethoven as card-carrying classicist with narrative surprises up his sleeve. Brawn emphasises the moments of tension and repose without exaggeration, finding equal portions of spark, nobility and darkness en route.

Although some pianists hurl themselves into the explosive passages in the Sonata No 17 (Op 31 No 2, the Tempest) at the expense of the hushed episodes, Brawn achieves a superb balance between contrasting materials. Even at full tilt, he never pushes his sound over the edge into brittleness, no easy feat in this sonata.

Brawn's ability to illuminate the myriad atmospheres and moods in Beethoven's music is nowhere more apparent than in the Sonata No 26 (Op 81a, Les adieux). The mysterious and wistful passages in the first two movements receive as much expressive consideration as the finale's joyous outbursts, which Brawn takes for an exhilarating ride.

Donald Rosenberg

# Beethoven

'Autumn Passion: Beethoven Retrospective -Three Great Sonatas Encore' Piano Sonatas - No 8, 'Pathétique', Op 13; No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 23, 'Appassionata', Op 57; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a - II; III Roberto McCausland Dieppa pi Scruffy Records (F) 020567658 (68' • DDD)



More than a few things may strike you as odd even before you hear a note of Roberto

McCausland Dieppa's new recording. The title, 'Autumn Passion: Beethoven Retrospective', appears to have nothing to do with the 'three great sonatas' the pianist performs here. Actually, it's three and twothirds, since he plays the last two movements of the Les adieux Sonata as 'encores' and omits the first, even though it could have fitted easily on the disc.

The pianist's bio inside states that 'Dieppa interprets standard repertoire with unequaled uniqueness in style and with incessant energy'. These claims happen to be true but they're not always to the music's advantage. While there are impressive moments when the pianist shows a firm command of the sonatas' varied challenges, he too often applies his uniqueness and energy in ways that shed more light on McCausland Dieppa than on Beethoven.

Yes, the Appassionata calls for great intensity of expression, but it would help if the performance also had more contrast of dynamics and nuance, minus so much incessant aggression. Similarly, the Pathétique goes by without sufficient gradations or flexibility of phrasing, sounding glib and reckless. The first two movements of the Moonlight Sonata are more settled, with fine unfolding of the famous triplet motion in the first and a lovely lilting quality in the second. Then the pianist takes off on a wild flight in a finale that is more blurry than exciting.

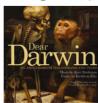
The two movements of Les adieux are tossed with little mystery or buoyancy. Incessant they are. Donald Rosenberg

# Brickman

Dear Darwin<sup>a</sup>. International: Bridge: Peace<sup>b</sup>. Mayday Roseb

<sup>a</sup>Nancy Ellen Ogle *sop* <sup>a</sup>Ginger Yang Hwalek *pf* bScott Brickman elecs

Ravello (F) RR7888 (58' • DDD)



Many evolutions are at the core of this recording of music by Scott Brickman. The

disc's title, 'Dear Darwin', refers to the songcycle set to poems by Kathleen Ellis paying tribute to Charles Darwin, whose On the Origin of Species laid the groundwork for generations of discussion and debate. In

26 short songs, the cycle conjures subjects that fascinated Darwin, such as human relations and nature. The piece is dubbed 'an abecedarium for soprano and piano', meaning the song titles travel through the English alphabet, starting with 'A is for Apple' and ending with 'Zygote'. It's a clever conceit, and Ellis's verses provide much amusement amid serious consideration of the topics.

Brickman's music for the songs has roots in serial writing, without adhering to the rules or veering too far into uncharted harmonic territory. The vocal lines can be jagged or lyrical, as befits the subject, and the piano part often takes the lead, establishes atmosphere or adds subtle splashes of expressive colour. There are moments when the music is a bit dour for the emotions being expressed but the songs have enough contrasts of mood and metre to keep the ear intrigued. The cycle receives sensitive shadings from soprano Nancy Ellen Ogle and pianist Ginger Yang Hwalek.

Surrounding the songs are electroacoustic pieces that couldn't inhabit more different sound worlds - Mayday Rose (2006) and International: Bridge: Peace (2003). The latter is especially striking in its collage-like use of biblical texts in many languages.

**Donald Rosenberg** 

# Chesky

Rap Symphonya. Street Beats. Central Park Dances <sup>a</sup>Mike Two, <sup>a</sup>Leber rappers

Orchestra of the 21st Century Chesky (F) JD364 (45' • DDD)



Urged on by sentiments such as 'Kill the Philharmonic' and 'New York is burning',

David Chesky's 20-minute Rap Symphony, which presents what the composer calls 'a world of depth transitioning into an imagebased superficial culture', is a powerful demonstration of orchestral virtuosity from a composer whose roots lie in an analogue time when the Schwann and Gramophone record catalogues were every classical music lover's bibles. After a dark, haunted opening of Sibelian dimensions, Chesky lays down a laid-back, jazz-like pulse over which strings, winds and percussion combine in a series of miraculously transparent ensemble and solo riffs; it's an absorbing dialogue that always seems to be leading to something momentous but keeps getting sidetracked in a series of colourful if narcissistic poses and attitudes.



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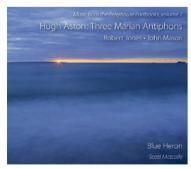
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ALEX ROSS, THE NEW YORKER



# VOLUME II Nicholas Ludford Missa Regnum mundi

"I cannot recommend this superb CD highly enough—it is the sort of recording to listen to in awe at the sustained and unerring skill of the performers and the burgeoning brilliance of the composers (and their unobtrusive editor), and to shed a quiet tear for the untold treasures that have been lost."

D. JAMES ROSS, EARLY MUSIC REVIEW



# VOLUME III Nicholas Ludford Missa Inclina cor meum

"Exemplary... suffused with elegance and polish... Intense, expressively heightened dramas that unfold in a kind of purified, meditative slow motion."

MATTHEW GUERRIERI, THE BOSTON GLOBE

"Sublime music sung sublimely."

IVAN MOODY



# VOLUME IV Robert Jones Missa Spes nostra

COMING APRIL 2015



Exhilarating ride: James Brawn offers tension and repose in the third volume of his Beethoven piano sonata cycle

The first interruption of this dazzling tonal fabric by rappers Mike Two and Leber occurs 60 seconds in; after that, they join the action occasionally, a Greek chorus delivering messages scripted by Chesky about cultural doom. Chesky's YouTube video, with its slick slideshow of dance and images, adds visceral urban impact; on disc, however, what dominates is the command with which Chesky uses the resources of the modern orchestra.

Chesky's similarly kinetic *Street Beats* for percussion quartet adds a beguiling flexibility of metre within its seemingly straightforward pace; like the symphony it is recorded with vivid punch and timbre, and lots of spatial data. His three *Central Park Dances* are less exceptional. Bill Milkowski's intense notes include a rare sighting of 'canoodling' in a CD booklet. Laurence Vittes

# Chopin · Schumann

Chopin Cello Sonata, Op 65. Etude, Op 10 No 6 (arr Glazunov). Wiosna, Op 74 No 2 Schumann

Adagio and Allegro, Op 70. Träumerei, Op 15 No 7 (arr Davidoff). Im wunderschönen Monat Mai, Op 48 No 1

Orazio Ferrari db Marco Sanna pf Velut Luna (F) CVLD245 (50' • DDD)



For some reason, like bassoonists, double bassists trend incongruously towards

being substantial musicians. They are not given much opportunity in the general run of classical music events, of course, aside from the occasional *Trout* Quintet or Mahler First Symphony. A young Italian with the name of a racing machine wants to change that reality. His name is Orazio Ferrari and in 50 minutes of music originally written for cello he posits whether the double bass is moving closer to centre stage.

Ferrari plays the music as written, not transcribed an octave lower as is customary

for even the greatest double bassists; he also tunes his instrument's strings in fifths instead of the standard fourths, which leads to clearer, more accurate performance in all ranges of the bass, as well as greater tonal richness. By doing so, Ferrari accesses repertoire which allows bassists to show what good musicians they are.

Ferrari's ambitions are most persuasively realized in Chopin's sad, late Cello Sonata in G minor, Op 65, in which his plaintive double bass tone substitutes convincingly for the cello, although the well-known tune in the Largo simpers a bit. Schumann's Adagio and Allegro, Op 70, is the only other substantial piece on the programme. It sounds difficult on the cello and difficult too on the bass; it's at its best, in fact, when played as it was originally written, for the horn. Through all these trials, pianist Marco Sanna is a marvellously fluent, flexible partner in crime, taking particular advantage of the pianistic beauties that abound in the Chopin Sonata. Laurence Vittes

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# THE SCENE

The Handel and Haydn Society performs Handel's Messiah for the 161st time, Renée Fleming stars in The Merry Widow, and Michael Tilson Thomas celebrates his 70th birthday in style

# **BOSTON, MA**

# **Handel and Haydn Society**

# Holiday concerts (Nov 28-30; Dec 18 & 21)

The Handel and Haydn Society, dedicated to performing Baroque and Classical music, has been active in Boston since 1815. In 2015 it's celebrating its bicentennial with a range of concerts that include Bach's St Matthew Passion, Haydn's *The Creation* and Mendelssohn's *Elijah*. One of the mainstay works for the society is, of course. Handel's Messiah, which receives its 161st annual performance in late November Harry Christophers leads the Period Instrument Orchestra and Chorus, along with a roster of acclaimed soloists. In December they present A Bach Christmas, which includes Cantata 40 and Cantata IV from the Christmas Oratorio. as well as the Op 6 No 8 Concerto grosso by Corelli, inscribed by the composer with the instruction Fatto per la notte di Natale ('Made for the night of Christmas').

handelandhaydn.org

# **CHICAGO**

# Chicago Symphony Orchestra Prieto and Yeh (Dec 18-20)

The Mexican-born maestro Carlos Miguel Prieto presents a vibrant and rhythmically thrilling programme, including the tone-poem *Sensemayá* by Mexican composer Revueltas; and CSO Principal Percussionist Cynthia Yeh performing James MacMillan's *Veni, veni, Emmanuel,* a showpiece based on the Advent plainchant of the same name. The concert ends with the orchestra at full tilt in Lutosławski's energetic Concerto for Orchestra, whose sound palette draws on Polish folksongs.

cso.org

# NEW YORK, NY Trinity Wall Street

### Twelfth Night Festival (Dec 26 - Jan 6)

Trinity Wall Street presents its third annual Twelfth Night Festival, New York's winter early music festival (a mix of free and ticketed events). This year it begins with a performance of Bach's complete orchestral suites by the Trinity Baroque Orchestra, featuring the Trinity Scholars and directed by harpsichordist-conductor Avi Stein. There are many guest artists, too: Gotham Early Music Scene performs the medieval *Play of Daniel*, and the Grammy Award-winning octet Roomful of



# NEWARK, NJ New Jersey Symphony Orchestra Winter Festival: Sounds of Shakespeare (Jan 9-25)

The New Jersey Symphony Orchestra (pictured) embarks on a festival project inspired by the works of William Shakespeare.

A highlight is the two-week residency of violinist Sarah Chang, who anchors the last two weekends of the festival. The first week sees Music Director Jacques Lacombe lead the NJSO in concerts of music inspired by Romeo and Juliet. with works by Tchaikovsky. Prokofiev and Gounod. Actors from the Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey perform scenes to complement the music-making. The second week includes music from Bernstein's West Side Story Suite (the composer's reimagining of Romeo and Juliet in Hell's Kitchen), which features Chang as soloist, as well as selections from Samuel Barber's Anthony and Cleopatra. Week three, meanwhile, presents Korngold's Much Ado About Nothing Suite, as well as music from Elgar's Falstaff.

njsymphony.org

Teeth offers up an evening of vocal works. Another highlight is Handel's *Saul*, featuring the Trinity Baroque Orchestra and the Choir of Trinity Wall Street, led by Julian Wachner.

trinitywallstreet.org

# NEW YORK, NY Metropolitan Opera

### Lehár: The Merry Widow (Dec 31 - May 7)

This new production stars Renée Fleming as Hanna, a wealthy widow who captivates all of Paris. Franz Lehár's charming and enduring operetta also marks Met Opera debuts for its Tony Award-winning director Susan Stroman and Broadway star Kelli O'Hara (who plays Valencienne); Nathan Gunn stars as Count Danilo. Mezzo-soprano Susan Graham takes over the lead role later in the run. Sir Andrew Davis and Fabio Luisi conduct.

metopera.org

# **US TOUR**

# Gidon Kremer and Daniil Trifonov Mozart, Weinberg and others (Jan 5-23)

# Mozart, Weinberg and others (Jan 5-23)

The remarkable violinist Gidon Kremer and dazzling young pianist Daniil Trifonov present various programmes of works that run the gamut from Mozart and Schubert to Mieczysław Weinberg and Philip Glass. Kremer has long championed the work of Weinberg, a Polishborn Soviet composer often eclipsed by his friend Shostakovich. Of late, Weinberg's work is

being rediscovered (including last season's performances of his opera *The Passenger*). Kremer and Trifonov take this intriguing recital programme on the road, including stops in Princeton, Baltimore and Toronto, and finishing at New York's Carnegie Hall on January 23.

carnegiehall.org

# **SAN FRANCISCO**

### **San Francisco Symphony**

# MTT's 70th Birthday Gala (Jan 15); Stravinsky: The Soldier's Tale (Jan 16-18)

Michael Tilson Thomas celebrates two important milestones this season - his 70th birthday and two decades as Music Director of San Francisco Symphony. Naturally, there's a gala concert, this one featuring a dazzling array of star pianists to perform Liszt's Hexaméron - a piano extravaganza with virtuosity, courtesy of Emanuel Ax, Jeremy Denk, Marc-André Hamelin, Jean-Yves Thibaudet and Yuja Wang. With the fireworks over, a set of concerts sees MTT leading the orchestra in performances of Stravinsky's The Soldier's Tale, a theatrical work featuring a guest actor. This is paired with John Adams's Grand Pianola Music (for two pianos, three female voices, wind, brass and percussion), which was first performed by the SFS in 1982.

sfsymphony.org

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# Partnerships are what make orchestras great

hat makes a great orchestra? It's six years since we asked a number of leading critics from around the world to help us rank ensembles and to answer this question. While musicianship and technical virtuosity are givens, I'd say that much else is down to partnerships. Partnerships between conductors and players, but also between the players themselves (not least in the venerable Vienna Philharmonic, of which more later, for whom no specific music director is appointed). To a lesser but still very important extent, partnerships between musicians and administration – for the former to know they have the support of the latter in the journey they wish to take is crucial (as becomes so evident when it falls apart). And then there is that between musicians and audience. Hearing quite how many people turned up simply to hear the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra announce its new season, let alone to hear the less popular of Shostakovich's symphonies, is evidence of how just one such partnership - that between Vasily Petrenko and the people of Liverpool – has proved such a success.

Success ebbs and flows as musical partnerships change, blossom or decay – a slow process, and I feel it's too soon to meaningfully ask the question again that we did back in 2008 and expect our answer to be based on particularly different evidence.

But I ponder all this now partly because the orchestra we praised above all others then, the Royal Concertgebouw, has just announced its new Chief Conductor, Daniele Gatti. Few orchestras embody that notion of partnership quite as well as the Royal

Concertgebouw: though it was founded in 1888, Gatti will be only its seventh musical boss. Some people talk of a continuity of sound, a tradition, being passed through generations there – as they do of another of today's mighty ensembles, the Leipzig Gewandhaus, heirs to the eras of Mendelssohn and Brahms, and currently excelling under Riccardo Chailly. Gatti's inheritance at the Royal Concertgebouw is a rich one: we wish him and his players well as they embark on a new era, and in particularly difficult times.

Earlier this month the Birgit Nilsson Prize was formally awarded to the Vienna Philharmonic, which will spend the money on opening up its archive as widely as possible (now there's a decision which speaks of an awareness of history). The prize was established by the singer to honour a musician (or ensemble) who represents the absolute epitome of excellence. The \$1m prize pot has attracted some comment – but that's no bad thing. We live in times when it's increasingly hard for classical music to get itself discussed in the wider media. If the Birgit Nilsson Prize can earn its winners the same popular prominence as the Nobel Prize does for recipients in the fields of literature or science, then this would be good news.

And is the Vienna Philharmonic still a great orchestra? Everyone has their own way of judging that; but hearing the controlled strength and beauty of sound in pianissimo passages at the prize-winner's gala concert, I would say so. Either that, or the transformative effects of being a handed a very large cheque really should be bottled.

martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com



# THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Was I rehearing Maurizio Pollini's Hammerklavier or rather hearing it for the first time in certain respects?

says JED DISTLER. 'Time creates perspective. As for Harriet Smith, who brought me to Gramophone in 1997, it was invigorating and great fun to talk "piano shop" with her again in this month's "Classics Revisited"."



Ever since my early years, when the impact of those stunning Antal Dorati Mercury Living Presence I Ps

epitomised how recorded sound could deliver, I've been a fan of this conductor,' says ROB COWAN of the subject of his 'Icons' essay. 'The drama, incisiveness and sheer brilliance of Dorati's performances remain etched in my memory.'



'Having spent much of last year focusing on the Lutosławski centenary, I was eager to move on in 2014 to mark

the centenary of his friend and collaborator, Sir Andrzej Panufnik,' says MICHAEL McMANUS. 'It was a privilege to contrast the lives of these contemporaries who rejected the extremes of their time and forged their own individual paths.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Mike Ashman • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Duncan Druce • Adrian Edwards Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Iain Fenlon • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood Caroline Gill • Edward Greenfield • David Gutman • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Tess Knighton • Richard Lawrence • Ivan March • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • Ken Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

Gramophone, which has been serving the classical music world since 1923, is first and foremost a monthly review magazine, delivered today in both print and digital formats. It boasts an eminent and knowledgeable panel of experts. which reviews the full range of classical music recordings. Its reviews are completely independent. In addition to reviews, its interviews and features help readers to explore in greater depth the recordings that the magazine covers, as well as offer insight into the work of composers and performers. It is the magazine for the classical record collector, as well as for the enthusiast starting a voyage of discovery.

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### EDITORIAL

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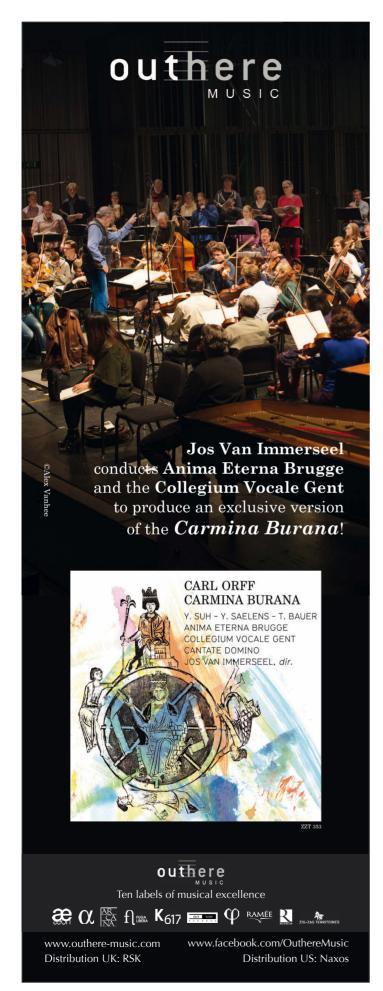
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# **MY MUSIC**

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Film producer David Puttnam on how a chance meeting in New York led to loving classical music



# **AMAZON** LABEL OF THE MONTH



La Fauvette Passerinette: a Messiaen premiere Peter Hill piano

In 2012, leading pianist and Messiaen scholar Peter Hill made a remarkable discovery among the composer's papers: several pages of tightly written manuscript from 1961, constituting a near-complete and hitherto unknown work for piano. Hill was able to fill in some missing dynamics and articulations by consulting Messiaen's birdsong notebooks, and here sets this glittering addition to Messiaen's piano output in the context both of the composer's own earlier work and of music by the many younger composers on whom Messiaen was a profound influence - from Stockhausen and Takemitsu to George Benjamin, who like Hill himself worked closely with the composer in the years before his death.

'A new Messiaen work may be the focus here, but this would be an outstanding recital even without that enticement' - BBC Music Magazine, November 2014, INSTRUMENTAL CHOICE



DCD34152

Dormi Jesu: A Caius Christmas

Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge / Geoffrey Webber

It was with typical discernment that Geoffrey Webber responded to a request to put together his dream Christmas programme. Webber's classy choir reveals and delights in equal measure, finding space for both the Venetian lushness of Gabrieli and the distilled purity of Webern in a seasonal collection which is also sprinkled with unexpected gems of more recent provenance. Edward Higginbottom's jazz-infused Rocking Carol, Thomas Hewitt Jones's eloquently expressive What child is this?, and the small miracle that is Matthew Owens' reimagined setting of The Holly and the lvy-all glitter in a programme that dovetails old and new with characteristic Cambridge sophistication.



Christmas with the Shepherds Morales - Mouton - Stabile The Marian Consort / Rory McCleery

A Christmas programme with a difference: Rory McCleery and his acclaimed consort echo the shepherds' noels through a motet by Jean Mouton which, astonishingly, remained in the repertoire of the Sistine Chapel for over a hundred years after its composition around 1515. So famous already by the middle of the century, when Cristóbal de Morales was engaged as a singer in the papal chapel, Mouton's motet went on to form the basis for a mass by Morales, and, later still, for a new motet to the same text by Annibale Stabile. A world premiere recording of the latter work crowns this unique programme, for which McCleery has prepared new performing editions.







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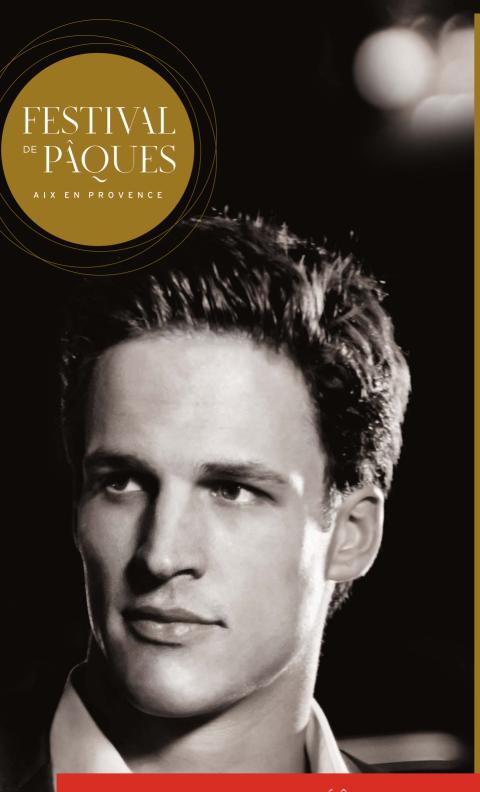
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# GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice

**Cullingford's** pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews





**CHOPIN** Preludes, Op 28. Piano Works **Ingrid Fliter** pf Linn (F) . GCKD475 ► HARRIET SMITH'S **REVIEW IS ON** PAGE 22

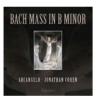
October's fine pianist in this section - Igor Levit - is followed by another. Ingrid Fliter's contribution to recorded Chopin is beautiful and distinguished, as this latest disc of the Preludes demonstrates.



JS BACH Violin Concertos Joshua Bell vn ASMF Sony Classical ® 88843 08779-2 The rapport between

Bell and his Academy colleagues is the real joy here. The concertos are both thrilling and moving, and the Chaconne arrangement a fascinating curiosity.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 24



**JS BACH** Mass in B minor Soloists; Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen Hyperion © 2 CDA68051/2

The young group Arcangelo's hit rate on disc is impressively high and this superb recording of Bach's masterpiece is the musicians' boldest statement yet.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 70



'A ROYAL TRIO' Lawrence 7azzo counterten La Nuova Musica / David Bates Harmonia Mundi 

An insight into the rivalries of 18thcentury London's operatic scene - and these performances demonstrate what a wonderful scene that must have been!

▶ REVIEW ON PAGE 94



**BEETHOVEN** Piano Sonatas Alessio Bax pf Signum © SIGCD397 A powerful, personal and entirely successful

surmounting of the Hammerklavier's fearsome challenges from another of the impressive young pianists we're so fortunate to have today.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 57



**HOWELLS** Stabat mater. Te Deum The Bach Choir: Bournemouth SO / **David Hill** Naxos ® 8 573176

A very moving performance of Howells's reflections on Mary's sorrow in a work that drew on the composer's own painful grief upon the loss of his son.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 73



'ST PETERSBURG' Cecilia Bartoli mez I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis Decca © 478 6767DH Bartoli's latest

exploration of the unfamiliar strikes gold again - here she disinters some works which wonderfully suit her dramatic strengths and she delivers them brilliantly.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 94

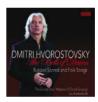


**DEBUSSY** 

Images, Préludes, Book 2 Marc-André Hamelin pf Hyperion © CDA67920 The many facets of this music - its

delicacy, reflectiveness and mysterious drama – are all brilliantly explored by Hamelin, who paints characterful images for the listener throughout.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 61



**'THE BELLS** OF DAWN' **Dmitri Hvorostovsky** bar **Grand Choir 'Masters** of Choral Singing' / Lev Kontorovich

Ondine © ODE1238-2

Whether singing Russian sacred or folk music, Hvorostovksy is both wonderfully dramatic and touching.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 77



'STELLA DI NAPOLI' Joyce DiDonato mez Opéra de Lyon Orch / Riccardo Minasi Erato © 2564 63656-2 The aria from

Maria Stuarda which DiDonato sings so triumphantly is but one highlight on this sumptuous disc from one of today's most impressive singers.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 95



### **DVD/BLU-RAY**

MAHLER Symphony No 5 Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly

Accentus (F) 222 ACC10284; (F) 222 ACC10284 Chailly offers rewarding insights in both performance and discussion into Mahler's Fifth Symphony.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 31



### **REISSUE/ARCHIVE**

**CHOPIN** Piano Works Murray Perahia pf Sonv Classical (\$) (6) 88843 06243-2

A handy box containing Perahia's ever-thoughtful

and virtuoso Chopin at a truly bargain price.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 85



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# FOR THE RECORD



Responsibility: one of Davey's first tasks as Radio 3 Controller will be to appoint someone to run the Proms

# Arts Council's Alan Davey to succeed Roger Wright as Controller of Radio 3

BC Radio 3's new Controller has been named as Alan Davey. He succeeds Roger Wright, who stepped down from the role this summer after 15 years in the post to become Chief Executive of Aldeburgh Music. Davey, 53, is currently the Chief Executive Officer of Arts Council England, a post he has held since 2007. He will take up the Radio 3 role – which also involves overseeing the BBC orchestras and the BBC Singers – in January.

Davey said: 'It is an honour to be asked to lead this wonderful institution and to renew it for the digital age, helping new audiences to encounter the wonderful things serious music and culture can bring. I stumbled upon Radio 3 when I was a teenager, and it opened a door to an endlessly fascinating world of sound and thought that has nourished me ever since.'

Unlike Wright and his predecessor Nicholas Kenyon, who had both followed classical music-specific paths prior to their appointments, Davey's senior posts have been in overarching general arts roles; prior to the Arts Council, he was Director for Culture at the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. BBC Director-General Tony Hall described Davey as having 'a formidable track record in the arts and a depth of understanding only matched by his passion for classical music.'



# BBC Music is launched by an 'impossible' orchestra

The BBC launched BBC Music, its new music initiative, with the broadcast of a new recording of 'God Only Knows' by The Beach Boys. The recording features the BBC Concert Orchestra alongside the likes of Alison Balsom, Pharrell Williams, Nicola Benedetti, Chris Martin, Danielle de Niese, Martin James Bartlett, Stevie Wonder, Brian Wilson, Katie Derham, Gareth Malone, Elton John, Jools Holland, Jamie Cullum, Brian May and the Tees Valley Youth Choir. The song is available to download from iTunes with profits going to Children in Need.

BBC Music will, according to the BBC, 'encompass TV and radio programming, digital services and schemes to support emerging talent including the introduction of classical music to UK primary schools.'

Bob Shennan, director of BBC Music, said: 'This "impossible" orchestra is a celebration of all the talent, diversity and musical passion found every single day throughout the BBC.'

# Alpesh Chauhan is appointed CBSO's new Assistant Conductor

Alpesh Chauhan has been installed as the CBSO's first Conducting Fellow since December 2013. So successful has this new scheme been for both Chauhan and the orchestra that the CBSO has now appointed the 24-year-old as Assistant Conductor. The role involves working closely with Music Director Andris Nelsons, before conducting a Summer Showcase concert in June 2015.

# The Monteverdi Choir celebrates 50 years with a novel recording

Sir John Eliot Gardiner and the Monteverdi Choir have celebrated their

# Tugan Sokhiev to leave Deutsches Symphonie in 2016

nly last year the conductor Tugan Sokhiev wrote a Diary for *Gramophone* about his frantic but rewarding lifestyle as the Music Director of both the Orchestre National du Capitole de Toulouse and the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin.

On October 7, however, the 37-year old Russian maestro announced that he

will not be continuing at the Berlin-based orchestra when his current contract expires in 2016, in order to devote more time to his new post as Artistic Director at the Bolshoi Theatre.

Sokhiev took on the role at the Moscow opera house in January this year, signing a four year contract which began with immediate effect.

He succeeded Vassily Sinaisky, who had resigned the previous month.

In his statement, Sokhiev described the DSO as 'an excellent ensemble' but said that the Bolshoi job 'requires too much presence and attention on my part in the medium-term to allow me to stay with my orchestra and fulfil my duties in Berlin with good conscience.' BUOTOCO ABUY. BUILDED GEOGE HISTORY TO AT 100.



Opportunity: Chauhan strengthens his CBSO ties

50th anniversary with a concert at Milton Court in London which featured Scarlatti's *Stabat mater*, Bach's Cantata No 199 and Handel's *Dixit Dominus*, which has been a regular repertoire work for the Monteverdi Choir throughout its long career. The performance was recorded and made available digitally the following morning (priced at £5) via the Monteverdi Choir's own website.

Also celebrating an anniversary this season is Gardiner's Orchestre Révolutionnaire et Romantique, which was founded 25 years ago. The orchestra is marking the occasion by releasing a live recording of Beethoven's Second and Eighth Symphonies on the Soli Deo Gloria label, which *Gramophone* will review in the December issue.

# Plácido Domingo headlines the iTunes Festival closing concert

With typical style and charisma, Plácido Domingo brought to an end the iTunes Festival which also saw violinist Nicola Benedetti, guitarist Miloš Karadaglić and composer Eric Whitacre join musicians from all genres take to the Roundhouse stage.

# Daniele Gatti is named as Chief Conductor of Royal Concertgebouw

aniele Gatti has been named as the new Chief Conductor of the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra. The Italian maestro will take up the post in 2016.

Historically, the orchestra – one of today's finest, and in fact allocated the top position in our 2008 survey of the world's leading orchestras – has had a remarkably low turnover of chief conductors. Gatti will be only the seventh in the orchestra's history, following on from Willem Kes (1888-95), Willem Mengelberg (1895-1945), Eduard van Beinum (1945-59), Bernard Haitink (1963-88), Riccardo Chailly (1988-2004) and most recently Mariss Jansons, who took up the post in 2004.

Gatti first conducted the orchestra in that same year, and has returned regularly since then, most recently in June when he conducted Verdi's *Falstaff* at the Dutch National Opera. He next conducts the RCO on November 27, 28 and 30, in Mahler's Symphony No 6. In 2008 he conducted Berg for a release on the orchestra's in-house label.

Managing Director Jan Raes said of the appointment: 'It is with great conviction that the orchestra has chosen a partnership with a conductor embodying such passion, dedication and experience. This was readily apparent from the keen involvement of the orchestra members in the rigorous selection process.'

Gatti's previous conducting posts have included Music Director of the French National Orchestra (2008-present), Chief Conductor of the Zurich Opera (2009-2012) and Principal Conductor of the Royal Philharmonic Orchestra (1996–2009).



 $Seal \ of \ approval: Gatti \ first \ conducted \ the \ RCO \ in \ 2004 \ and \ has \ worked \ regularly \ with \ the \ ensemble \ ever \ since$ 

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# **PODCASTS**

Martin Cullingford speaks to US violinist Joshua Bell (pictured) about his role as Music Director of the Academy of St Martin in the Fields as well as his new Bach album, an Editor's Choice this month (reviewed on p24).



# **BLOGS**

Gramophone's huge online readership attracts leading artists and composers to write passionate and witty blogs and, occasionally, to fight their corner. Recent bloggers have included cellist Natalie Clein (who pleaded the case for a larger repertoire of cello music to be heard in concert halls), composers Unsuk Chin and Max Richter, and pianists Benjamin Grosvenor, Mark Bebbington, Barry Douglas and Janina Fialkowska (who wrote about how Chopin's Mazurkas offered her a 'glimpse of paradise'). Who'll be next?

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# ENLIGHTENED ENLIGHTENS ENLIGHTENS

With her new album 'St Petersburg', Cecilia Bartoli opens a window on a hidden period of musical life in the Russian city, during which three visionary tsaritsas allowed music to thrive. Perhaps, writes James Jolly, they shared a kindred spirit with Bartoli herself

hen I was studying at the Conservatory in Rome I remember being told, in the history of music classes, that opera in Russia started with Glinka's A Life for the Tsar. We were told that 1836 was the date when it all happened. But when I began to do my own research into Baroque music, I discovered that there was opera in St Petersburg 100 years

earlier, and that even someone as important as Nicola Porpora had planned to go there, but instead sent a fellow Neapolitan, Francesco Araia – and *he* was someone I'd encountered when I did my "Sacrificium" project.' Cecilia Bartoli may be the world's best-selling classical artist, with nearly seven million albums sold, and the closest thing we have to a superstar, but she's not averse to rolling up her sleeves and getting stuck into the research – and the fruits of her most recent bout of detective work are the tracks on 'St Petersburg', another 'concept-album' collaboration with the conductor Diego Fasolis.

'St Petersburg' opens a window on an all-but-unknown period of musical life in the Russian city, a period that flourished under three enlightened empresses. These three tsaritsas – Anna Ioannovna (who reigned from 1730-40), Elizabeth Petrovna (1741-62) and Catherine the Great (1762-96) – continued the work of Peter the Great in turning their vast country to face the West and dragging this often superstitious, highly devout and very conservative empire into the modern age. Bartoli, a force to be reckoned with in her own right, clearly warmed to the era of Imperial Girl Power and set off for St Petersburg to carry out research at the Mariinsky archive. (The fact that many of the composers who worked at the Court in the 18th century also hailed from Italy merely quickened her step.)

'This is a project I've wanted to do for many years,' Bartoli explains. 'I've always been interested in musicians who emigrated from Italy. And in the Baroque period, Italian musicians travelled all over the place. Quite a few



Russian winter: an 18th-century view of the Bolshoi Theatre in St Petersburg

went to London – Porpora, for instance – and others went to Spain.' (As an aside, and to prove the extent of the Italian diaspora, Bartoli tells a story of an encounter following a performance in Chicago, with Daniel Barenboim conducting, of one of the Mozart operas to a da Ponte libretto. 'After the concert, we were in Daniel's dressing room and there was a knock on the door. A man came in and

said "I'm part of the da Ponte family, a direct descendent of Lorenzo da Ponte!" It was amazing.')

The 'St Petersburg' project has been simmering for many years, and has run into its fair share of problems along the way. The initial investigations actually started before the fall of the Iron Curtain, but after perestroika, it was easier to go to Russia. 'But still,' Bartoli recalls, 'getting into the Mariinsky archives at the Kirov was a complicated process. At the time there was a kind of exclusivity for restoration with the library in Washington, and again it created problems. But when I finally got there, I was absolutely amazed at what I found. The richness of the archive is largely due to the fact that when a composer finished his contract – what we'd call "mandato" in Italian – he had to leave all the scores. So there was no way they could bring them back to Italy. Of course, it was a bit frustrating having to select the programme for a single CD of about 80 minutes – I could easily do "St Petersburg 2", "3" and "4"!'

Once installed in the Mariinsky archive, Bartoli had a team of enthusiastic Russian ladies who would go off and find the scores and parts. Bartoli would sort the music, setting aside things that caught her imagination. Then, her musical collaborator and conductor Diego Fasolis would prepare the orchestral parts and, later on, singer and instrumentalists would sing and play through the pieces.

The recording sessions coincided precisely with the Winter Olympics at Sochi, not exactly a time when Russia was flavour of the moment. And the timing of the release hardly finds Putin's Russia close to many hearts. Bartoli rolls

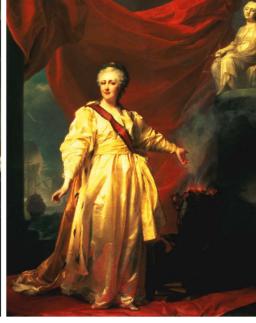
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Getting access to the Mariinsky archives was complicated, but I was amazed at what I found'









Three visionary tsaritsas who changed the face of musical St Petersburg: (L-R) Anna Ioannovna in 1730; Elizabeth Petrovna in c1750; and Catherine the Great in the early 1780s

I consider myself a singer but also an

singing - if you can't, you're not a singer!"

her eyes and suggests that the album might be her own little contribution of peace in these politically strained times.

meet up with Cecilia Bartoli in the beautiful concert hall of the Mozarteum in Salzburg. The mezzo, stylishly dressed in a dove-grey suit, looks remarkably relaxed for someone just about to start a run of La Cenerentola as part of the summer festival. But then, Bartoli can almost count Salzburg as a home from home as she is the Artistic Director of the Whitsun Festival, a job she takes very seriously. In recent years, she's explored a special theme each year with notable success and 2014 offered a feast of Rossini, 'Rossinissimo'. But being Bartoli, it wasn't just a case of stringing together a selection of the Italian's music - she had a mission: 'I wanted to show the different facets of Rossini's music - especially in Austria and Germany, where people are used to going to a

Rossini opera and considering him a comic composer. In fact during his life Rossini was more famous for the opera seria actress. You must tell a story with your than for opera buffa.' And the performances of Rossini's Otello - a first for Salzburg -

were not only a personal triumph for Bartoli but also a major reassessment of this important stagework.

I first interviewed Bartoli in 1989 - she spoke no English, and I spoke no Italian – but the vivacity of her expression, and the almost uncontrollable excitement with which she approached her still-fledgling profession made the service of an interpreter almost unnecessary. Nowadays, her English is fluent but the enthusiasm remains and those eyes - which flash with real Roman fire – punctuate everything she says. In so many ways, she hasn't changed at all! But what has changed is that she has become a musical phenomenon, and the way she plans her life is closer to a rock star than one of her classical colleagues. Most years, in the autumn, she releases an album, tightly themed, imaginatively put together and stunningly packaged. She then embarks on a concert tour based on the album, but which also allows her to supplement the 'fixed' programme of the CD with music that there wasn't room for in the studio, and a video of one of the concerts is often made.

'Much as I like recording,' Bartoli confides, 'I love to perform for a live audience even more. In the end I feel it is extremely, extremely important to perform the music. Somehow you

grow with performances. Also, after all the rehearsals and performances, you reach a level of understanding that would never happen if you just did it for a recording. And performance is what being a singer is all about. Also, for me you cannot detach the fact that you are a singer and also an actress. You must tell a story with your singing – if you can't, if you're unable to tell the story, then for me you are not a singer! Through the roles, and through the music, you must paint a narrative. You must be able to do that. And I love to do it. I love to tell different stories and play different characters. I'm quite a chameleon, really!'

Bartoli's regular 'concept albums' have done an enormous service to a host of composers from the Baroque to the Classical period - poor Antonio Salieri, slandered by everyone from Rimsky-Korsakov to Peter Shaffer, got a substantial leg-up from Bartoli in 2003. 'I had to fight to make that recording,'

Bartoli recalls. 'It was a way of not making another Mozart album! Much as I love Mozart - he was without doubt a genius - I know he was influenced by Haydn and by Salieri. And Salieri was not a bad composer!

He was as good as Paisiello, as Cimarosa, as Galuppi. We just did a Schubertiade here at the Mozarteum the other day and I sang a group of Lieder in Italian by Schubert. Schubert had been taught by Salieri and he'd been forced to write in Italian. Salieri said, "You must do it in Italian with a Metastasio text!" That Salieri album was a real revelation for me – I really didn't expect such good music from him.' And a similar revelation presented itself to Bartoli when Nikolaus Harnoncourt - one of Bartoli's earliest champions and someone she clearly admires enormously – suggested she explore the operatic work of Haydn. 'I knew his instrumental music and The Creation, but the operas of Haydn - wow, unbelievable! Of course I'd heard the Antal Dorati series on disc - beautiful recordings with amazing singers like Jessye Norman and Samuel Ramey. And Harnoncourt was right: it's more inventive, it risks more with the harmonies. Maybe because he had a salary at Eisenstadt, and

hile Prince Nikolaus Esterházy was maintaining his court at Eisenstadt, complete with a large musical retinue, the rulers of the Russian empire

was paid anyway, he felt he could compose whatever he wanted.'

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were looking to emulate that kind of enlightened cultural environment at their palaces in St Petersburg. Peter the Great - who ruled from 1682 to 1725 - was the tsar who instigated major changes in, among other areas, taxation, government, scientific endeavour and education. Peter's successor, Anna Ioannovna (his niece), surprised her court officials by proving far from malleable and undertook to continue her uncle's work with zeal, but she was also interested in establishing a strong cultural life at her court. 'She was the first tsaritsa to invite an Italian operatic troupe to her court,' Bartoli explains. 'She was in contact with the King of Poland and she basically borrowed his musicians for a year.' Anna's successor was Peter the Great's daughter Elizabeth Petrovna, a woman of striking single-mindedness – she disliked bloodshed to the extent that she abolished the death penalty. She was a great Francophile, established French theatre at the court, sang in her private chapel choir, encouraged the composition of secular music and was responsible for the first opera sung to a Russian libretto.

The third great empress was the Prussian-born Catherine the Great, who ascended to the throne by despatching her husband Peter III and instigating the longest rule by a female leader in Russian history. She's received a mixed press largely due to the rumours of her supposed interest in erotic pursuits (Decca's booklet includes a photograph of a table that was allegedly owned by Catherine - to describe it as priapic would be an understatement! And two centuries later, Cole Porter wrote the song 'Kate the Great' for the musical Anything Goes and Ethel Merman refused to sing it!). Catherine continued to support music-making at court and even wrote the libretti for some operas herself.

These three powerful and visionary women created a climate in which music thrived, and each employed a court composer who, thanks to Bartoli, is celebrated on the new album. 'I was very surprised at the quality of music that I found. Take Francesco Araia, who was one of the first to have composed at the Russian court. As I said, I've sung his music for another project, "Sacrificium". What was fascinating was to hear how his music changed when he arrived in Russia. Suddenly I had the feeling that his style had altered a little bit: the music is not as pyrotechnic as we are used to hearing in typical Baroque Italian music. No, there are a lot of arias which are much slower and nostalgic – it's somehow as if Araia was trying to do research into the Russian soul. I was astonished!' Araia had been the composer who brought the first Italian troupe to St Petersburg and he holds the distinction of having written the first opera to be performed in Russia, La forza dell'amore e dell'odio in 1736. Later, he would write the first opera to a Russian libretto, *Tsefai e Prokris* in 1755.

ecilia Bartoli usually sings in Italian, with an occasional excursion into French, but on 'St Petersburg' she makes her debut on disc singing in Russian. How was the experience? She laughs. 'I remember talking with Mirella Freni many years ago. I was in the US with Mirella and Pavarotti because we were doing the recording of Manon Lescaut with James Levine (I was singing the Musico). And I remember asking, "Mirella, what is it like singing in Russian?" She did quite a few Tchaikovsky operas [Tatyana in Eugene Onegin, Lisa in The Queen of Spades and Ioanna in The Maid of Orleans]. And she said, "But Cecilia, of course it's difficult but somehow the sound of the language is round." She said you have to study it but it's not impossible and you can have real pleasure in singing Russian.' She did have a Bulgarian husband, Nicolai Ghiaurov, I suggest, for whom Russian would have come more naturally. 'That's true,' replies Bartoli. 'My husband is Swiss, so that's not much help for

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Glittering opulence: in a setting mirroring the grandeur of the 18th-century Russian Court, Bartoli launches 'St Petersburg' in Versailles with I Barocchisti and Diego Fasolis

anything except yodelling! But when I saw the Russian operas and the beautiful arias I said I would love at least to try; it's a challenge, but I want to try. So I found a teacher, who is also a musician – a violinist – and did it! Now maybe some Russian singers, if they enjoy what they hear, might do the music themselves.'

As with all Bartoli's annual projects, there are some real discoveries on the latest album and, for me, the one composer - hitherto unheard - who made the greatest impression was the German-born harpsichordist Hermann Raupach. He came to the St Petersburg Court as the assistant to Vincenzo Manfredini who succeeded Araia as the Court Composer. Manfredini was engaged by Catherine's short-lived predecessor (and husband), the aforementioned Peter III. When he was despatched, Manfredini lost his job and Raupach took over. 'Of all the composers on the album, Raupach is the one I wish had written more,' Bartoli says. Raupach wrote the second Russian opera, Alsesta, and he's the one who gave Bartoli her chance to sing in Russian. Later in life, he'd encounter the young Mozart who would work one of Raupach's keyboard sonatas into a concerto. And the lure of Russia was such that he returned to Russia, ending his career teaching at the Academy of Fine Arts in St Petersburg where he died.

If Raupach is the major discovery on 'St Petersburg', the curiosity of the project is surely a Prologue to Johann Adolf Hasse's 1735 opera *La clemenza di Tito*, written to mark the Coronation of Tsaritsa Elizabeth in 1741. (Mozart's opera of the same name wouldn't be composed for another half-century.) It's a joint effort by two Italian musicians at the St Petersburg court, Domenico Dall'Oglio and Luigi Madonis, and includes standout parts for flute and archlute – it's heart-stoppingly beautiful and draws glorious *legato* singing from Bartoli.

Then I first met Bartoli in 1989 to talk about her debut on Decca (she was introduced to the label by the producer, the late Christopher Raeburn), there

was always the suggestion that one day *Carmen* would be on the 'To Do' list. Bartoli laughs and deftly side-steps the inevitable question by heading off in a different direction. 'Actually last year we have done Norma - which was a big step I have to say. I think since you mention Carmen, much as I love Carmen, I think Norma is definitely bigger still. Norma is a real opera about love; definitely much more than Carmen - many aspects of love, love and conflict, which makes it, I think, an even more demanding role than Carmen. We did it with period instruments, and it was a huge, huge success. We went back to the original version so there were no cuts and we restored the original tonality. We also had a young singer doing Adalgisa, which makes the story much more clear. It makes sense of what's going - Pollione quit Norma for the youngest priestess. You know, for me, it was really a revelation and I hope that plans to tour it work out. This production – by Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier – was so special because somehow it's so near the audience. We are forced to act. Here is a real play and it becomes so dramatic - and so shocking - because you can almost touch the stage. They set it in the Second World War and it's kind of Anna Magnani-esque – she's trying to love the wrong man!'

Performing Rossini's music – or Bellini's or Donizetti's – on period instruments, Bartoli believes, adds a totally new dimension in the dialogue between the stage and the orchestra. 'You know, when I went for the first time to Bayreuth – it was James Levine who invited me – and saw the *Walküre* I was quite shocked to realise that the theatre at Bayreuth that Wagner wanted for his music is quite small. And very intimate. So I thought but, why are we used to screaming this music – especially when it's done in big spaces – in order to be heard? Maybe it's a time to reconsider how to perform the music of Rossini, of Bellini, because it's quite evident today that if you go and listen to Handel operas it's not Claudio Scimone and his orchestra anymore. We love to hear Baroque music on

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period instruments. And thanks to this kind of renaissance I think there is an audience now who are quite educated and ready to take this step into 19th-century music as well. Without people like Harnoncourt and Hogwood, we would probably still be performing Baroque music on modern instruments in Italy!'

Choice of collaborator, as much as choice of repertoire, must account for Bartoli's fine vocal health. She modestly agrees: 'I think, also, that performing 19th-century music on period instruments, when it's not all about the orchestra, is a way to have career longevity. When the orchestra dominates, there is no chance of communication, there's no way of making dialogue, and I think that with period instruments it's crystal clear what you have to do. Unfortunately, if you look back to the careers of some great singers, they were very short. Somehow, I think that my repertoire – starting with Monteverdi and going up to Rossini – is much bigger than that of many verismo singers. Sometimes people say, "But your repertoire is limited!'

Seated in the Mozarteum, I feel duty-bound to Salzburg's most famous son to ask if Mozart still has a place in Bartoli's repertoire. She smiles and her eyes twinkle. 'My dream is one day to have a cast for The Marriage of Figaro...' ... where you swap roles?' I interject. 'Yes! That would be fantastic. Can you imagine it? I'd love to sing the Countess in The Marriage of Figaro and I've always dreamed of singing Marcellina. Wow!' 'Well, you've done all the female roles in Così fan tutte,' I point out, before suggesting a production of Così where the audience votes, just before curtain up, as to who sings which role - 'Am I doing Fiordiligi, Dorabella or Despina tonight?' We agree that it would be quite a tough ask for the singers: Bartoli nods furiously, eyes flashing, and laughs. The irony, though, is that of the three women in the cast, the one who would be up for it, and faultlessly prepared, would be Bartoli! 6 ▶ To read Gramophone's review of 'St Petersburg', turn to page 95

# A CECILA BARTOLI QUARTET

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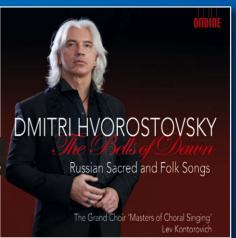
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# All these musicians are falling in love with his music, saying they want to play it again and again'

Sir Andrzej Panufnik's widow is delighted that the centenary celebrations for her husband are reigniting an appreciation of his music. It's about time, writes Michael McManus

never met Andrzej Panufnik, though I did, over several years, become acquainted with his lifelong friend Witold Lutosławski. Lutosławski was born in 1913, but baby Andrzej arrived in 1914, just weeks after the horror of the First World War began. They belonged to the same echelon of Polish society: the highly educated, artistically inclined middle class, who shared romantic dreams of Poland regaining its freedom, national identity and integrity from the great powers which

had long disputed and divided its territory. These erudite, thoughtful, intellectually fastidious people could almost have sprung from the pages of Pushkin, Turgenev or Chekhov; and they went on to suffer incalculable pain and loss successively at the hands of Bolsheviks, Nazis and Stalinists. Both Panufnik and Lutosławski lost a brother and numerous other relatives to wars and purges, and it seems incredible that the Polish intelligentsia survived at all. Yet when I first visited Warsaw in 1988, I witnessed at first hand its incipient, cautious resurgence. This tradition bred Andrzej Panufnik.

Panufnik's father was a noted hydro engineer who in his spare time was one of Poland's leading violin makers. His part-English mother was a talented amateur musician. Neither encouraged their son's precocious musical endeavours, even when they manifested themselves in the form of advanced compositions before he had reached the age of 10. By the time he entered the Warsaw Conservatoire at the age of 17, Panufnik had written several popular hit tunes. He spent most of the Second World War in Warsaw, where he and Lutosławski would play their own piano arrangements for four hands together in cafes, despite constant harassment and intimidation by the occupying Germans. Panufnik also wrote several large-scale and serious works, but those early compositions



With André Previn, who conducted the 1981 premiere of Concertino in London

were lost – not to the wild conflagrations of war, but because the woman who moved into the flat where they were kept during the Warsaw Uprising didn't know what the scores signified and casually disposed of them. Panufnik would subsequently 'recompose' some, but most were lost to posterity.

In the early post-war years musicians in Poland were able to compose broadly what they wanted, and Panufnik was a celebrated and much-decorated figure, comparable in standing to

Shostakovich in the Soviet Union or Britten in England. He enjoyed the privilege of foreign travel but soon found himself under duress, forced to compose music that the regime required of him – the usual noxious odes to Stalin and so forth. His first two post-war symphonies were firmly rooted in Polish tradition, but the second of them, the Symphony of Peace, in such fraught times acquired unfortunate political overtones and he withdrew it, later to recast it and shorten it significantly (and rename it Sinfonia elegiaca) once he had the freedom to do so. It was not long before he joined the ranks of the many artists accused of the ill-defined crime of 'formalism' by agents of the state. He duly prepared an escape route, slipping his minders at Zurich airport and taking a plane to London, where he arrived on Bastille Day 1954 to seek asylum. After his defection he immediately became a 'non-person' in Poland and, as a stranger in a new land, urgently needed to establish himself both musically and financially.

In 1957 Bernard Stevens described Panufnik as 'one of the most remarkable composers of his generation', reserving his most glowing praise for the *Symphony of Peace*: 'Only a composer of consummate mastery could achieve such simplicity and at the same time avoid banality.' In that same year Panufnik took charge of the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

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His prowess as a conductor briefly overshadowed his calling as a composer, but the political intrigues that came with the job gave him no pleasure. He did not give his own compositions the prominence he might have done, but he did make concert programmes less conservative. În 1959 he moved on in order to devote himself to composition - somewhat unproductively and impecuniously, until his fortunes turned in 1963, when he received the substantial Prince Rainier prize for the third of his mature symphonies, the Sinfonia sacra. This was the first symphony he had composed in the West, but

it was written in celebration of the millennium of Poland's Christianity and statehood, drawing inspiration from the first known hymn in the Polish language and retaining a strong Polish flavour. It remains his most popular work. The second great revolution in his life was his second marriage, to the photographer and writer Camilla Jessel. The couple soon moved into a large house in Twickenham, which had belonged to Camilla's family but had been left to the local council, who didn't know what to do with it. She gave her expatriate husband the nurturing that came naturally to her, but which he had been hitherto denied both by events and by a childhood chilled by conservative social mores. Panufnik's first real English home became his sanctuary.



Top: Panufnik (front row, centre) with conductor Seiji Ozawa and producer Harold Lawrence (left) in Boston, 1982. Bottom: with Sir Georg Solti in Chicago, also 1982

In the United States, Panufnik's music was championed by Leopold Stokowski, who conducted premiere performances of his Sinfonia elegiaca, Katyn Epitaph and Universal Prayer, but, unfortunately for him, the BBC was in its baneful era of dodecaphonic musical correctness and his works were deemed too accessible to be acceptable for broadcast. In 1966, his local MP even wrote a letter of complaint, asking for an 'absolute assurance' that the Corporation's long ban on his constituent's music was not attributable to 'prejudice against him, either on account of his former nationality, his

political views or for any other reason'. After 1954, Panufnik was for three decades a composer not only wholly rejected by his native land but also not fully accepted in his adoptive land, in both cases for reasons that were less than purely aesthetic. Despite the political, as well as cultural, challenges that continued to beset Panufnik, his oeuvre did, slowly but surely, become better known and appreciated.

By his own admission, in his four middle-period symphonies his preoccupation with patterns and form potentially threw up barriers between his music and music lovers – the endless symmetries, inversions and predetermined mathematical patterns did not make for a highly accessible idiom. In his final three symphonies, leading up to No 10 and his historic return



With his wife, Camilla, at home in Twickenham - taken towards the end of his life

to the land of his birth, Panufnik somehow regained the passion and warmth of his earlier pieces, combined with an even greater mastery of means. His Eighth Symphony (Sinfonia votiva), though not strictly programmatic, was indissolubly connected with events in Poland at the time, in particular the rise of the Solidarność trade union. No 9 – always a number laden with profound significance, even for those little disposed towards superstition – was perhaps his grandest statement of all, a symphony of hope. His 10th, however, was a short, even somewhat understated, piece, which was followed by his last major orchestral work, a Cello Concerto written for Rostropovich and duly performed and recorded by him. Both pieces perfectly embody the meticulous, fastidious nature of both the man and his music.

At times, critics have adopted a somewhat patronising, even disdainful, attitude towards Panufnik, the recurrent theme being that his devotion to structure and the scale of his ambition exceeded his gift for harmonic and thematic invention. To my ears, though, his spare style proclaims strength and focus, not a lack of inspiration or resource. I think Roman Maciejewski summed up the compositional style very well: 'Economy of means, simplicity of texture, four or seven note cells and the interplay between major and minor keys. . . He is, essentially speaking, a miniaturist.' As I write this piece listening to some of Panufnik's most ambitious symphonic works (perhaps paradoxically) I can hear the truth of this for myself.

In 1990, already a sick man, Panufnik agreed to return to Poland, as the Russian yoke was lifting and democracy was declared. He conducted a concert at the famous Warsaw Autumn Festival, to great acclaim. It would be his last visit, for cancer claimed him almost exactly a year later, shortly after he received a knighthood (which he at first thought was someone playing a prank on him). Sir Andrzej was mourned in England, Poland and far beyond, receiving a warm obituary in the January 1992 edition of this magazine, which dubbed him 'one of the most consistently individual voices this century'. The *Daily Telegraph* echoed this, praising 'one of the most potent voices in music this century'.

Camilla Panufnik is now the most devoted of widows, just as she was once a devoted wife. The centenary celebrations for Panufnik and Lutosławski across 2013-14 have generated an extraordinary number of concerts, seminars and lectures. On Sunday November 30, at Kings Place in London, she will be the leading lady at Panufnik 100: a Family Celebration,

an event at which live performances of his songs and chamber music will take place alongside a film showing and reminiscences from Lady Panufnik and her two children record producer and graphic artist Jem and composer Roxanna. Over half a century after she met and married Andrzej, Camilla is still a strikingly elegant, beautiful and dauntingly energetic woman, whose vocabulary seemingly lacks the word 'no', even in the face of demands at which most people in the prime of life would baulk. When I visit her by the River Thames on a glorious summer day, she has just been invited back to Poland for yet another event, at a mere day's notice. Of course, she has accepted. The final word here rightly belongs to her: 'What is so inspiring about this year is all these musicians, who've never performed his music before, falling in love with it, saying they want to play it again and again and they want to know about other works. People, especially in Poland, are suddenly claiming him as their own, but he's partly British too. He spent half of his life in England and he had British ancestors, so we are in him and they are in him and I think he bridges two countries.' 6

To explore the recent Gramophone gallery 'Inside the mind of composer Andrzej Panufnik', visit gramophone.co.uk/features/gallery/panufnik

# PANUFNIK ON RECORD

A quartet of recent recordings of Panufnik's music



### Symphonies Nos 1 & 4. Polonia. Lullaby

Polish Radio Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz CPO (F) 777 496-2

The CPO survey of Panufnik's orchestral works is comprehensive and uniformly excellent. This CD gives

an excellent flavour of the composer's orchestral works, including his haunting Lullaby (played to great effect at last year's BBC Proms); the tone-poem Polonia, which Panufnik himself conducted at the Proms in 1959; and the first of his surviving symphonies.



# **Bassoon Concerto.** Symphony No 9, 'Sinfonia di speranza' Robert Thompson bn BBC SO / Sir Andrzej Panufnik

Heritage M HTGCD266 (7/14)

This CD is a one-off, sourced from the BBC archives.

It includes not only two of Panufnik's most engaging later works, but also the composer's own beautifully modulated voice, calmly but compellingly introducing the listener to the music in his gently inflected but entirely idiomatic English.



'Reflections' - solo piano works by Andrzej and Roxanna Panufnik

Clare Hammond pf

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It is a particular delight not only to hear the remarkably

varied range of pieces that Panufnik père composed for the keyboard, but also to have them enhanced considerably by the inclusion of pieces by his daughter, Roxanna, whose short but powerful work Three Paths to Peace enjoyed such a powerful premiere at the BBC Proms this year.



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Brodsky Quartet; Robert Smissen va Richard May vc Chandos © CHAN10839

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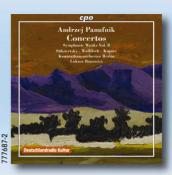


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# A fond farewell to CHRISTOPHER HOGWOOD

David Vickers pays tribute to one of the most influential musicians of the past 50 years, an intellectually curious experimenter who challenged centuries of musical tradition

hristopher Hogwood was an inquisitive performer of music ranging from medieval to Martinů and Stravinsky, an accomplished musicologist, harpsichordist (also an enthusiast of the clavichord and virginal), and an eminently readable author of numerous publications including useful books on two of his most beloved composers, Handel and Haydn. The abiding influence of his work on generations of listeners, musicians and scholars is incalculably great.

The most significant British conductor of the past century not to have received a knighthood, Hogwood was awarded a CBE in 1989. His broad portfolio makes it only natural that he was

awarded honorary doctorates from five different institutions, most recently from the Royal College of Music (2013), and he also received various distinguished honours from his alma mater, Cambridge University – where he had read Music and Classics at Pembroke College. It was there that he met David Munrow, with whom he co-founded the pioneering Early Music Consort in 1967. Hogwood continued his musical studies with Thurston Dart, with Zuzana Růžičková in Prague (where his passion for Czech music grew) and in Amsterdam with Gustav Leonhardt. For nine years he was the regular continuo harpsichordist for Neville Marriner's Academy of St Martin in the Fields. Growing eager to try out experiments at playing early-18th-century music on period instruments, in 1973 Hogwood founded the Academy of Ancient Music, naming it after the famous concert society active in 18th-century London.

Hogwood and the AAM produced a steady stream of about 250 recordings, almost all for Decca's imprint L'Oiseau-Lyre, and almost all produced by Peter Wadland. Hogwood was among the vanguard of cultured iconoclasts who had the intellectual curiosity to ask difficult questions about complacently accepted traditions that often smothered valuable aspects of over-familiar repertoire. He championed new hypothetical theories about instrument types and performance practice styles, applying these to a broad



'The abiding influence of his work on generations of listeners, musicians and scholars is incalculably great'

cross-section of Baroque and Classical works. At the heart of everything was his intellectual curiosity, an enthusiasm for collaborating with musicological advisors, and a fondness for artistic experimentation. His experiments often led him to re-evaluate the reliability of texts and he was an appreciative supporter of scholarly editorial projects, such as the Purcell Society edition and the Handel Institute (of which he was President). More recently, he was closely involved in editions of Geminiani, CPE Bach, Mendelssohn and Martinů.

Hogwood divided his spare time between France, Tuscany and Cambridge, where he was always generous with his time, expertise and hospitality

to musical and scholarly visitors. It was not uncommon for him to invite people over for lunch, over which musical and academic matters would be discussed enthusiastically. He amiably confided to me on one such occasion: 'I'm unusual because I prefer Haydn to Mozart, and I like Handel more than Bach.' This casual statement confirmed what most of us already suspected but this typical modesty ought not obscure his seminal Mozart recordings: a groundbreaking survey of the complete symphonies, an attractive version of Die Entführung aus dem Serail, a superb Mass in C minor (essential for Arleen Auger's radiant 'Et incarnatus est' and much else), clarinet and horn concertos played exquisitely by Anthony Pay and Anthony Halstead respectively, and elegant violin concertos showcasing long-serving AAM leader Simon Standage. Admittedly, Hogwood's Bach discography was rather smaller but his leanly stylish approach is evident in the AAM's polished Brandenburg Concertos, harpsichord concertos with Christophe Rousset and wedding cantatas sung by Emma Kirkby.

Frequent accomplices Kirkby and James Bowman as front-rank soloists blossomed thanks to their close artistic partnerships and recordings with Hogwood and the AAM, such as *Stabat mater* settings by Vivaldi and Pergolesi. Other renowned breakthroughs include one of the first period-instrument Beethoven symphony cycles (The Hanover Band just beat the AAM to it by a whisker),

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but Hogwood also gave equal consideration to Telemann concertos, Stamitz symphonies, and his abiding interest in early English and Italian keyboard music.

He was a judicious Purcellian, as confirmed by his theatrically entertaining and beguilingly beautiful *Dido and Aeneas*, featuring a fine cast led by Catherine Bott. More uniquely, the AAM's complete survey of Purcell's incidental theatre music was a milestone of advancement into the composer's lesser-known music; recordings of the Rondeau from *Abdelazer* are two-apenny but Hogwood enabled us to hear the other music Purcell composed for the play, and also larger-scale incidental music from plays such as *Bonduca* and *Circe* (some of which featured Andrew Parrott and the Taverner Choir).

Handel was at the core of Hogwood's achievements. His reconstruction of the 1754 Foundling Hospital version of Messiah still ranks as one of the freshest and most musically illuminating perspectives on the oratorio ever recorded. Other collaborations with Simon Preston and the Choir of Christ Church Cathedral, Oxford, included seminal recordings of Handel's Utrecht Te Deum and the Birthday Ode for Queen Anne – works that were then largely unknown. Hogwood also explored the more obscure corners of Handel's vast output, such as a revelatory recording of chamber duets featuring Kirkby and Judith Nelson. World-premiere recordings of the incidental music to Alceste and the early English oratorios Esther and Athalia (winner of a Gramophone Award in 1987) were matched in peerless quality by a fresh interpretation of the Roman oratorio *La Resurrezione* and an elegant performance of Orlando. During rehearsals for a Handel opera a few years ago, he instructed one of the star singers: 'Only embellish noticeably if the result's better than what Handel actually wrote.' Hogwood was devoted to letting the composer's music speak for itself.

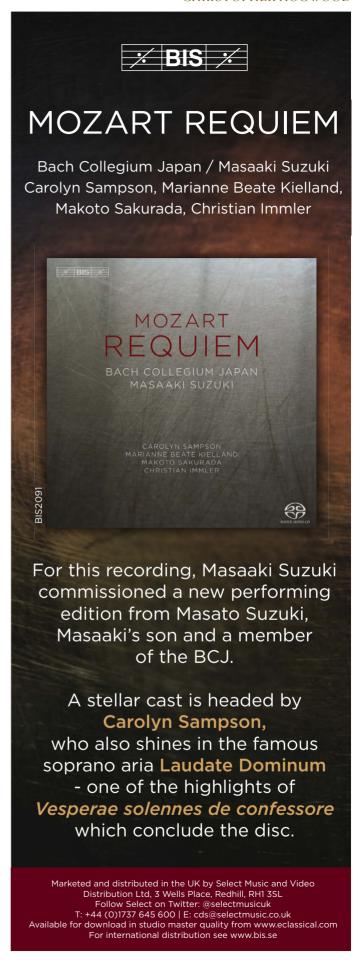
Occasionally contentious and always influential, his work led to operatic ventures spearheaded by Cecilia Bartoli, including landmark recordings of Mozart's *La clemenza di Tito*, Haydn's *Orfeo ed Euridice* and Handel's *Rinaldo* (another *Gramophone* Award-winner, 2001). He was also busy as a guest conductor and held various posts; he was the Artistic Director of Boston's Handel and Haydn Society (1986-2001), with whom he made several recordings of Mozart's arrangements of Handel.

During the late 1990s the decline of the classical industry's economic muscle and changing priorities meant that the AAM's delightful survey of Mozart's piano concertos with Robert Levin was cancelled midway through, and it is a crying shame that a groundbreaking cycle of Haydn symphonies was aborted close towards its completion. At least there are plenty of outstanding performances of Haydn's Eszterháza symphonies to savour in addition to elegant readings of the organ, trumpet and cello concertos, and an inspirational recording of *The Creation* – the first with period instruments to be sung in English, with soloists Kirkby, Anthony Rolfe Johnson and David Thomas on compelling form.

In 2006 Hogwood handed over the reins of the AAM to Richard Egarr but remained his orchestra's Emeritus Director. Since then rare guest appearances with the AAM included magical concert performances of Handel's *Amadigi* and *Imeneo*. Listeners, audiences, musicians (professional and amateur) and scholars alike will be profoundly saddened by Hogwood's passing, but, to paraphrase a chorus from *The Creation*, we will continue to behold the marvellous work amazed. **6** 

Christopher Hogwood: born September 10, 1941; died September 24, 2014

To hear our Christopher Hogwood podcast, visit gramophone.co.uk/classical-music-news/remembering-christopher-hogwood



# GRAMOPHONE Reviews

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### **Editor's Choice**

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

# Recording of the Month

Harriet Smith praises the clarity of vision and sense of purpose in Ingrid Fliter's Chopin Preludes



# Chopin

Preludes, Op 28. Three Ecossaises, Op 72.

Mazurkas - No 1, Op 6 No 1; No 11, Op 17 No 2; No 13,
Op 17 No 4; No 32, Op 50 No 3; No 41, Op 63 No 3.

Nocturnes - No 3, Op 9 No 3; No 8, Op 27 No 2

Ingrid Fliter pf

Linn (Ē) → CKD475 (75' • DDD/DSD)

Preludes also available on (Ē) ◆ CKH575 (42')

It says a lot for this disc that, when *Gramophone*'s Editor chose it as his Recording of the Month and asked me for five listening points, I came up with nearly four times that number. No single interpretation of Chopin's Preludes will ever be enough but – just as she demonstrated in her previous disc of the two Chopin concertos (3/14) – the Argentinian Ingrid Fliter seems to be able to achieve individuality seemingly effortlessly, with cherishable and memorable results.

Truly innate Chopin players are rarer than you might think. From obvious examples such as Rubinstein and Cortot via Argerich and Freire (what is it with these South Americans?) I would add to that illustrious list Fliter. She has that magical way of creating an easeful *rubato* without ever sounding studied, and holds Classicism and freedom in perfect accord. Add to that a clarity of vision and a tremendous sense of purpose and you have a mesmerising set of Preludes. She doesn't ever sweeten the more acerbic moments: in the Second Prelude, for instance, she makes no attempt to soften



# 'Ingrid Fliter encompasses the diversity, the sometimes shocking juxtaposition of the Preludes'

the contours of the left-hand phrases in the manner of pianists such as Trifonov, who is altogether more consoling here. And in No 4 Fliter lays bare with utter naturalness the insistent falling semitone, forming a piquant contrast with the following Prelude, in which she gives Cortot a run for his money in terms of shimmery, shadowy elusiveness. In Fliter's readings you truly feel the complexity and ambiguity of works once described by Schumann as 'sketches, beginnings of études...ruins...all disorder and wild confusion'.

One of the aspects that particularly compels about this CD on repeated listening is the way Fliter encompasses the diversity, the sometimes shocking juxtaposition of the Preludes, but within a range that gives them a coherence, a sense of an interpretation as a

whole. Take Nos 6 and 7, for instance: here they acquire a kinship despite their different moods – and despite the fact that No 6 is pretty slow, possibly too slow for some tastes. But I find myself hypnotised rather than (perish the thought!) bored: contrast it with Kissin's approach, which ruffles the melody rather too insistently. Then compare her with Trifonov, whose live Preludes from Carnegie Hall provide a thrill a minute but who seems altogether too fast here. In fact he isn't by most standards: it's simply that Fliter draws so much from the music.

It's not just in slower preludes that Fliter flouts received wisdom (something she did so gloriously in the concertos, scotching the notion, aided and abetted by Jun Märkl's charismatic way with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra, that these are little more than a pianistic vehicle); she does it too in the 16th Prelude, where the étude-like moto perpetuo of the right hand is effortless but suitably 'notey' thanks to her pinpoint phrasing, while the muscular left hand gains in power rather than steamrollering its way in, as can happen in some readings (Kissin, for instance, who is relentless in his strength). By comparison, Trifonov is faster but he doesn't develop such a sense of menace as Fliter.

After this, the songful *Allegretto* of No 17 comes as balm, here given the range and story-telling quality of a Ballade. It starts innocently enough; but what is striking

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Chopin in all his flexibility and ambiguity: Ingrid Fliter proves a penetrating exponent of the master pianist's music, yet again

is the way she grounds it with the deep left-hand notes, the repeated A flat at the end tolling like some great bell but never overshadowing the interplay of the other lines, which Fliter balances to perfection.

She is a virtuoso of the first order but she holds this in reserve, so when she does unleash her full technical armoury, it's extraordinarily potent. She does so in No 14, for instance, matching Trifonov in powerful élan. On the other hand, the 19th Prelude eschews its *Vivace* marking. It's daringly dreamy, perhaps too much so for some tastes but not mine. The

# **Listening points** Your guide to the disc's memorable moments

# Track 6: Prelude No 6 in B flat minor (Lento assai). O'00"-1'35"

Fliter's slow tempo here should by rights drag but instead compels, as she hypnotises you into a truly desolate world. And listen to how eloquent her left hand is towards the close of this excerpt.

# Track 16: Prelude No 16 in B flat minor (Presto con fuoco), complete

Truly con fuoco but much more than just a wall of notes. The way the left hand becomes increasingly insistent gives the piece a subtle menace, while the sharply etched phrasing in the right hand gives the sense of a desperate chase.

## Track 23: Prelude No 23 in F major

### (Moderato), 0'00"-1'33"

There's a magical subtlety here to this brief Prelude, beautifully recorded even in the uppermost reaches of the instrument.

### Track 29: Mazurka, Op 6 No 1, 1'59"-2'53"

A masterpiece of characterisation, as Chopin's grace-note-inflected motif gives way to the main theme, Fliter pointing up the mazurka rhythm with enormous subtlety.

# Track 31: Nocturne, Op 27 No 2, 0'00"-2'30"

The Romantic and Classical elements of Chopin are held in perfect accord in Fliter's interpretation, while the return of the melody is a moment of pure poetry.

final trio of preludes takes us from the proto-Prokofievian toccata figuration of No 22 via the most restrained haloed playing in the daringly withdrawn F major, Fliter really bringing across its tinkling musical-box qualities, which is all the more touching when it is banished by the seismic drama of the final Prelude.

Of the remaining works, the two Nocturnes are particularly fine, the Mazurkas sometimes a degree less inevitable-sounding than some, though she bewitches in the quick-shifting moods of Op 6 No 1, which prefaces the third Op 9 Nocturne very effectively. The final Nocturne on the disc (Op 27 No 2) takes nothing for granted in spite of its fame, less lushly beautiful than some but altogether more complex, more intriguing. The recording captures well Fliter's innate beauty of sound, encompassing the dynamic range with ease. A gem of a disc. **6** 

Preludes – selected comparisons: Cortot (12/26<sup>8</sup>) (EMI) 361541-2 Kissin (4/00<sup>8</sup>) (RCA) 88697 62530-2 Trifonov (12/13) (DG) 479 1728GH

# Orchestral



# Arnold Whittall on a disc of three new works by Unsuk Chin:

'The music inevitably acquires a ritualistic aura but there is also plenty of visceral excitement' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 26



# Rob Cowan on the Szymanowski violin concertos live from Oslo:

'Skride's tender inflections are matched by parallel levels of warmth from the orchestra'

► REVIEW ON PAGE 36

# JL Adams

Become Ocean

Seattle Symphony Orchestra / Ludovic Morlot
Cantaloupe ® CA21101 (42' • DDD)



Awarded the 2014 Pulitzer Prize for Music, *Become Ocean* is set to finally extricate

John Luther Adams from the shadow of his near-namesake. In fact the two lie at polar ends of the post-minimal spectrum. JLA composes slowly evolving, monumental sound creations that seem somehow to emerge from the essence of the earth. His lifelong engagement with elemental forces and the power of nature stems from years living in the Alaskan wilderness, where he has evolved a 'music of place' grounded in its physical, cultural and spiritual attributes.

Surprising, therefore, that Adams's recent composition is inspired by the sea rather than the earth. *Become Ocean* takes the sense of scale and space that captured the composer's imagination when he first visited Alaska in the 1970s and applies it to the deep, dark and hidden depths of the oceans surrounding the Pacific Northwest.

This is not ersatz programmatic music, however. Adams's 'sonic geography' is a by-product of what can only be described as a keenly felt musical osmosis. If ever an orchestra sounded like an immense sonic object, slowly floating across a vast area, then this must be it. Become Ocean is divided into six seven-minute segments, with each one forming a kind of slow-motion wave. Some of these waves swell up into enormous, thunderous crashes, as heard around the 21' and 35' marks, causing changes in the music's environment - like shifting glaciers in a frozen sea. As if to demonstrate the connection, there's also a DVD consisting of six oceanic images looped in sequence to the music.

Of course, a strong cautionary message lies behind *Become Ocean*. To quote the composer himself: 'As the polar ice melts and sea level rises, we humans find

ourselves facing the prospect that once again we may quite literally become ocean.'

Pwyll ap Siôn

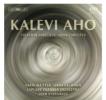
# Aho

Horn Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Acht Jahreszeiten<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Annu Salminen hn <sup>b</sup>Carolina Eyck theremin

Lapland Chamber Orchestra / John Storgårds

BIS (F) BIS2036 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Eighteen concertos, by the composer's own reckoning, for each of the main instruments

in the Romantic symphony orchestra, and counting. And most of them derive impetus from reinventing what their respective solo instruments can do. Quality is more important than quantity or gimmicks, however, and the two works here recorded, both composed in 2011, are deeply impressive in their poetry, drama and inventive vigour.

In the Horn Concerto, the immediately striking elements are the soloist's 'offcolour' natural harmonics and her perambulations around the platform, which see her at times with the cornist in the 20-piece chamber orchestra, and at times in more bizarre dialogues with the double bass or the oboe. There is a conceptual affinity here with Thea Musgrave's Horn Concerto of 1971, and I mean that as a compliment to both composers. But the accumulating energy of the first half of Aho's work is something all his own, as are the dance-like recovery after the becalmed central cadenza (also a signature feature of his Ninth and Fifteenth symphonies) and the shying-away from any kind of grandstand conclusion.

As for the theremin, stalwart of so many otherworldly or psychedelic film episodes, it comes with its own guarantee of what Aho calls 'shamanistic' magic. To this he adds the idea of a procession through the eight seasons of the Sami calendar. After several hearings I still wouldn't mind skipping over those passages where

Carolina Eyck has to sing as well as play, though the *trompe l'oreille* effect and her realisation of it are certainly ingenious. But rarely do more than a few seconds pass in an Aho score without something utterly transfixing in its sonic invention. By the end of 'Midnight Sun' – the final section – breath has well and truly been taken away.

Virtuosity in the service of imagination is the abiding impression of all Aho's concertos, and the quality of soloists, orchestra, conductor and recording here is fully up to that of the music itself. Another outstanding issue in a magnificent series from BIS. David Fanning

# JS Bach



Violin Concertos - BWV1041; BWV1042. Solo Violin Partita No 2, BWV1004 - Chaconne (arr Mendelssohn, orch Milone). Solo Violin Partita No 3, BWV1006 - Gavotte en rondeau (arr Schumann, orch Milone). Orchestral Suite No 3, BWV1068 - Air

Academy of St Martin in the Fields / Joshua Bell  $\lor n$  Sony Classical F 88843 08779-2 (50' • DDD)



Bach on the violin is perhaps the only remaining enclave in the composer's

oeuvre where partisan views on equipment and style still concede to individual interpretation. Most recently we have seen how Giuliano Carmignola's infectious 'period' Bach is comfortably accommodated in the mainstream (see below) and how Janine Jansen's self-conscious pluralism never overshadows her tireless spirit of discovery (Decca, 12/13).

Joshua Bell's Bach may start from a slight disadvantage, in that the 'Double' – the usual companion piece to the two solo concertos – is not included, so we have instead selected single movements and the ubiquitous 'Air on a G string'. Yet such is Bell's particular brand of ease with which he mixes traditional sensibility with the lighter articulations and gestures of recent tastes that one is instantly spellbound.

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Virtuosity of an all-purpose kind: Nelson Freire at the piano as Riccardo Chailly conducts the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in Beethoven's 'Emperor' Concerto

The A minor Concerto (BWV1041) is both urgent and radiantly inflected, the second movement mournfully still, hovering over the timeless blend of warmth and litheness which defines the Academy of St Martin in the Fields' accompaniments. Unerring energy is something of a byword for contemporary Baroque performance, often with a distinct lack of oxygen in the sinews of the lines. Bell is indeed no slouch on tempi – running the show as director – but his harnessing of the phraseology, to find an incremental logic in the long first movement of the E major Concerto (BWV1042), is profoundly gratifying.

With close microphone placement in the concertos, the sublime range of overtones from Bell's violin can tend occasionally towards the strident but it pays off handsomely in an almost unbearably intimate and intense middle movement of BWV1042 and visceral presence in the gleeful abandon of both final movements. Locating small shapes within a larger architecture is one of Bell's crowning virtues, alongside a depth of sound of almost Henryk Szeryng-like dimensions.

As to the curiosities here, the orchestral underpinning of the Chaconne is the *coup de grâce*, reworked from Mendelssohn's improvisation, alongside Schumann's own

piano accompaniment to the Gavotte from BWV1006, both orchestrated by the ingenious Julian Milone. Whether or not one is experiencing early-19th-century reception history 'in sound' is hard to say but the conception is original and exceptionally executed with searing and soaring artistic intent. One might conclude that a programme of just under 50 minutes is parsimonious but the overall value here transcends mere matters of the clock.

# JS Bach

Violin Concertos - BWV1041; BWV1042; BWV1043°; BWV1052*R*; BWV1056*R* Giuliano Carmignola, <sup>a</sup>Mayumi Hirasaki *yns* Concerto Köln

Archiv (F) 479 2695AH (74' • DDD)



For all the 'con moto' hype of modern-day Italian Baroque musicians in recent

years – including Giuliano Carmignola sitting on a Harley Davidson for his DG Vivaldi disc – the interesting provenance of the solo playing here is its emergence from a generation of Baroque playing rooted less in 'period' equipment and concomitant expectations than in the spirit of the music, per se. The modern-instrument I Virtuosi di Roma – whose longevity, from the early 1950s, has had such a profound effect on the dissemination of Italian string concertos – are openly recognised in this generous quintet of concertos as a source of inspiration to Carmignola, as indeed are David Oistrakh and Isaac Stern.

There is, however, no doubt that Carmignola is a man of his generation, choosing to work on Bach with one of the most versatile, pre-eminent and stylish of German ensembles. From the older generation, one can alight on the spaciousness of the playing, the robustness of rhythmic articulation and accentuation in the outer movements (really getting 'into' the string), and the overall unfussiness in the spontaneous intensity of Carmignola's front-footed projection. Yet in the cool phraseology of the slow movements of both the A minor (BWV1041) and E major (BWV1042), more elegantly observational than intimate, a contemporary dialect prevails, most memorably in a sweetly flowing Largo from the great Double Concerto (BWV1043): the voicing of the solo parts, with Carmignola playing second, is a supremely

distinguished essay in cultivated dovetailing and fresh dialogues.

If there are moments where a ferocious attention to sound and virtuoso dazzle can seem a touch wearing, the effect is momentary since Carmignola's urgency never leaves the listener breathless; agreeable inflections, such as the portamentos in the last movement of the Double, provide welcome coloration. Only in the outer movements of the G minor (BWV1056) - the F minor Harpsichord Concerto 'reimagined' - does the music ask for something more fluid, quixotic and rhetorical than Carmignola offers. He certainly does so in the D minor Harpsichord Concerto (BWV1052 - a more natural fit for a violin in the genre does not exist), a performance of visceral resonance and poetic engagement which has never been bettered.

One final general point: Carmignola does not edit out every impurity or 'gamy' tuning and the benefits to the character of the whole are incalculable.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

# **Bartók**

Kossuth, Sz75a. Two Portraits, Op 5 Sz37a. Suite No 1, Op 3 Sz60

<sup>a</sup>Michael Ludwig vn

**Buffalo Philharmonic Orchestra / JoAnn Falletta** Naxos ® 8 573307 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at Kleinhans Music Hall, Buffalo, NY, November 22 & 23, 2013



JoAnn Falletta's performances of these early Bartók show-stoppers really

do raise the roof. Making the First Suite sound compelling is no mean feat, and yet, right from the ebullient opening Allegro vivace, the Buffalo Philharmonic sound fully on course for the challenge: the first subject has an irresistible bounce to it, while the second, which leans lyrically on expressive woodwind-writing, is sensitively phrased. The solemn Poco adagio finds Bartók en route to Duke Bluebeard's Castle, a fact evidently not lost on Falletta and her responsive players; and then there's the swiftly waltzing third movement, swirling with heady abandon, much aided by a recording that captures the full range of Bartók's already masterly orchestration. More premonitions fill the Moderato fourth movement, which in turn gives way to an energetic finale that keeps threatening to turn into Borodin's Prince Igor Overture.

Kossuth, often cited as the fledgling Bartók's Ein Heldenleben, has been well served on CD by the likes of Iván Fischer (Philips, 1/99) and Herbert Blomstedt (Decca, 7/95) but Falletta's dramatic reading is every bit as effective as theirs, the desperate confrontation between Habsburg Austrians and Hungarians (ie at around 11'11") particularly exciting, the whole held together with a skill habitually employed by top-ranking conductors for Liszt's better-known tone-poems. You soon forget Bartók's tender age and start thinking of the work as a heartfelt piece of musical tragedy.

Likewise the *Two Portraits*, the first sweetly played by violinist Michael Ludwig, the second granted its full measure of implied scorn. Given the excellent playing and first-rate sound, I really can't see why anyone wanting to add these fascinating pieces to their library should look elsewhere, especially given the modest price point. **Rob Cowan** 

# Beethoven

Piano Concerto No 5, 'Emperor', Op 73°. Piano Sonata No 32, Op 111

Nelson Freire pf

<sup>a</sup>Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly Decca © 478 6771DH (62' • DDD)



Collectors who own the superlative set of the Brahms piano concertos which

Nelson Freire made with Chailly and the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra in the middle of the last decade (9/06) will know that he has the pianistic firepower to make his mark in Beethoven's *Emperor*. And so in some measure he does; this is a work which will always make its effect. Yet behind its bullish persona lie gradations of light and shade that require a specifically Beethovenian fineness and surety of touch. Its greatest interpreters – Curzon, Kempff, Gilels, Kovacevich, Perahia – have that. On the evidence of this new recording, Freire's virtuosity is of a more all-purpose kind.

The orchestral contribution is prompt and purposeful though occasionally over-intrusive. I can't imagine Beethoven expecting the solo cello he asks for at bar 157 of the opening movement, where the piano's *leggiermente* B minor subject thins to a single line, to sound quite so much like a ghost rumbling in the cellarage.

In a booklet interview, Freire says 'It makes sense: the last sonata and the last concerto,' before adding, by way of contradiction, that the works are not from the same period and that Beethoven still

had a long way to travel before he wrote his last sonata. I've always thought this a more or less inadmissible coupling: heroic E flat hurled brutally aside by the most frightening of all Beethoven's opening salvos. Here surely are two largely alien worlds. Consistent with his own view of the matter, Freire's Op 111 is strong on thrusting narrative; rather vaguer when it comes to those physical and metaphysical elements which a Schnabel, an Arrau or a Pollini identify and define. I think of Freire's strangely decorous treatment of the fioriture during the expressive arrest midway through the first-movement exposition or his casual treatment of the movement's close where the plagal cadences which sound over a rolling bass are unevenly voiced.

A piano sonata can work as coupling for the *Emperor*. The luminous late E major Sonata, Op 109, was added to the CD reissue of Stephen Kovacevich's classic account of the concerto (Philips, 12/89). Here are fine performances by a thoroughbred Beethovenian. What's more, Kovacevich's editors allow a decent pause between the two works, unlike Freire's who have the tumultuous off-beat minor key start to Op 111 crashing in only seconds after the concerto's end. How thoughtless is that? Richard Osborne

# Chin

Cello Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Piano Concerto<sup>b</sup>. Šu<sup>c</sup>
<sup>a</sup>Alban Gerhardt vc <sup>b</sup>Sunwook Kim pf
<sup>c</sup>Wu Wei sheng Seoul Philharmonic Orchestra /
Myung-Whun Chung
DG © 481 0971GH (72' • DDD)
<sup>c</sup>Recorded live at the Seoul Arts Centre,



Unsuk Chin is one of the best contemporary exponents of purely instrumental music

drama, and these concertos provide absorbing listening. The Piano Concerto owes an explicit debt to her teacher, Ligeti, but it also represents a gesture of independence. Its coruscating toccatas and interlocking rhythmic patterns acquire a distinctive luminosity in structures that constantly evolve and threaten disorientation, only to find new ways of suggesting stability. The piece works well when given the kind of effortlessly precise and virtuoso interpretation from both soloist and orchestra that it receives here.

The Cello Concerto was a highlight of the 2009 BBC Proms, and although the booklet-notes don't explain the nature of the work's 2013 revision, it remains an outstanding achievement. Spontaneously eloquent as well as powerfully dramatic, it provides Alban Gerhardt with every chance to display his superfine virtuosity, not only in affecting melodic lines, often in the cello's highest register, but also in more forceful and assertive ideas. The orchestral writing is perfectly judged to actively engage with and complement the soloist, and the reflective, questing ending is one of the most memorable in the contemporary concerto repertory.

Šu is an Egyptian mythological term for air; and Chin's 2009 composition features the Chinese mouth organ, the sheng, not to indulge in pseudo-exoticism but to explore the potential for interaction between this instrument and an orchestra using materials deriving very directly from the European expressionist tradition. The music inevitably acquires a ritualistic aura but there is also plenty of visceral excitement in a performance that is supremely well integrated and no less well recorded. A highly successful CD. Arnold Whittall

# **Donatoni**

In Cauda - II; III. Esa (In Cauda V).
Prom. Duo pour Bruno
Tokyo Philharmonic Orchestra / Yoichi Sugiyama
Neos ® NEOS11410 (74' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Suntory Foundation for Arts'
Summer Festival 2012



Discs by the Italian composer Franco Donatoni, who died in 2000, come along

rarely enough that each one of them feels like a treat. Donatoni was Yoichi Sugiyama's composition teacher; and although that's not a prerequisite for conducting his music, Sugiyama's inbuilt composerly toolkit helps him assemble these pieces with fluid understanding.

I use the word 'assemble' advisedly. Donatoni's music dwelt inside a fantasy world of his own making where rigorous, controlled mathematical process co-existed with harmonic disappearance tricks and stylised instrumental flourishes that, once unleashed, were pure Alice. *Prom*, written in 1999, gets to the essence of his late style. The piece was eventually performed at the Proms, although rumour has it Donatoni assumed that every commission from the BBC was for the Proms and delivered an improper title for a piece that was premiered at the Barbican.

But part of the old Donatoni magic was his knack of finding poetic resonance

within words that were, even if tenuously, connected with the circumstances of a commission. Thus Prom begins with the strings plodding amiably, walking up to the woodwind section to see if they have anything remotely interesting to say. Typically, Donatoni operated by splitting ensembles into sub-groups, and here the ensuing dialogue between woodwind and strings - is that really a hint of Beethoven's Fifth I hear? - suddenly falls down a rabbit hole as harp and pitched drums unexpectedly amble into view. This ragbag assortment of fragments finds its harmonic direction as Donatoni walks with his lines and the piece ends with a wry gag - double basses playing walking-bass patterns, promenading perhaps from the Barbican to the Albert Hall.

Rewind 30 years and Donatoni's Maderna tribute *Duo pour Bruno* sows the seeds – the same tactile obsession with shaping material, the same games with illusion. Sugiyama and the Tokyo Philharmonic play Donatoni's music with an appropriate poker face and clean attack, and three pieces from his late-period *In Cauda* cycle include some of the most crazily virtuoso contrabassoon writing you'll ever hear: a treat, unless you have to play it. **Philip Clark** 

# **Foulds**

Carnival. The Vision of Dante - Prelude. Lento e Scherzetto, Op 12<sup>a</sup>. Saint Joan Suite, Op 82. Hippolytus Prelude, Op 84 No 1. Puppet Ballet Suite. Badinage. Grand Durbar March <sup>a</sup>Beniamin Hughes VC

BBC Concert Orchestra / Ronald Corp Dutton Epoch © CDLX7311 (72' • DDD)



This may well be the most rewarding volume yet in Dutton's hugely enterprising

John Foulds series. Particularly striking here is the powerfully evocative and opulently scored Prelude from The Vision of Dante (1905-08), a concert opera in three acts for chorus and orchestra which sets Longfellow's translation of Dante's Divine Comedy. Both Elgar and Bantock sang the praises of this large-scale opus but it was never performed in Foulds's lifetime. A similar fate befell the contemporaneous (1906) Lento e Scherzetto for cello and orchestra, a bewitchingly lovely diptych that would seem to comprise the last two movements of a jettisoned concerto. Next comes a 17-minute suite from Foulds's 1924 incidental music for George Bernard Shaw's Saint Joan. It's strong in personality

and crammed full of first-rate invention, as for that matter is the eloquent, oboe-led Prelude from the score that Foulds supplied for a 1925 London production of Euripides's *Hippolytus*. There's also much that is endearing about the five-movement Puppet Ballet Suite of 1932-34, whose five numbers possess a nonchalant, Gallic flair. Last, but not least, we get two crowdpleasing encore items from Foulds's final years in India: the roistering Grand Durbar March (1937-38) makes a terrific splash (its trio section cleverly incorporates a raga melody), while the winsomely delicate Badinage (1936) boasts two maddeningly catchy tunes that are hard to dislodge from one's brain.

Throughout, Ronald Corp secures a chipper and affectionate response from the BBC Concert Orchestra. A truly excellent anthology, this, justly dedicated to the memory of the irreplaceable Malcolm MacDonald, the composer's doughtiest champion. Andrew Achenbach

# García

Auschwitz (nunca se olvidarán)<sup>a</sup>. Varadero Memories. In memoriam Earle Brown <sup>a</sup>Anjane Cecilia Girwarr sop <sup>a</sup>Glenda Fernandez-Vega mez <sup>a</sup>Rohan A Smith spkr <sup>a</sup>Florida International University Concert Choir; Málaga Philharmonic Orchestra / José Serebrier Toccata Classics ® TOCC0239 (55' • DDD)



Havana-born Orlando Jacinto García turns 60 this year, and this characteristically

courageous issue from Toccata Classics allows us the opportunity to assess what the composer himself describes in the booklet as 'three of my more important orchestral works'. García moved to the United States as a boy, studying initially with Dennis Kam at the University of Miami before becoming a private student of Morton Feldman.

Varadero Memories (1988) was the first work he completed after his studies with Feldman and holds fast to the composer's avowed intention of 'changing the perception of time in the listener and creating a static world'. Auschwitz (nunca se olvidarán) ('they will never be forgotten') dates from six years later and once again explores the themes of memory and loss, albeit more plangently, incorporating as it does both a wordless choral and a spoken element. In many ways, though, it's the most recent work, In memoriam Earle Brown from 2011, that serves up the most enduring rewards in the way that it eschews

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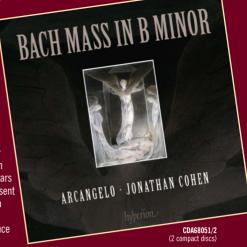


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THE BRABANT ENSEMBLE STEPHEN RICE conductor



# ROBERT SCHUMANN

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DANNY DRIVER piano





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WESTMINSTER CATHEDRAL CHOIR MARTIN BAKER conductor



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CDs, MP3 and lossless downloads of all our recordings are available from www.hyperion-records.co.uk musical logic by focusing instead on timbre, texture, sonority and chance, all filtered through a (to my ears, at any rate) unmistakably bluesy harmonic sensibility. This is a touching memorial to the modernist American composer who was García's close friend and colleague.

The performances under José Serebrier's lead have both enviable concentration and commitment in their favour. Decent sound and excellent presentation, too.

Andrew Achenbach

#### Goebbels · Zappa

'Perfect Strangers'

Goebbels Suite for Sampler and Orchestra from Surrogate Cities Zappa The Dog Breath Variations/Uncle Meat. Dupree's Paradise. The Perfect Stranger. G-Spot Tornado. Revised Music for Low Budget Orchestra Norwegian Radio Orchestra / Thomas Søndergård 



Yet a further outfit intent on ringing the changes, the Norwegian Radio

Orchestra juxtaposes works by figures who are not so much on the periphery as who have created their own takes on the mainstream. Heiner Goebbels is second to none in his mixed-media conceptions, with Surrogate Cities among the most ambitious as an inclusive entity (and as recorded by ECM, 6/00). As one of its components, Suite for Sampler and Orchestra gives a fair indication of its basis in the rise of the urban metropolis with all the potential for human alienation which ensues. An alienation here objectified, moreover, by relating each of its 10 movements to a Baroque form such that the interplay between sampled and orchestral material feels the more ominous for its overall restraint - the 'cities' of the title evoked without being made explicit.

Whereas Goebbels provokes, Frank Zappa overwhelms in his desire to confront the listener with his pungent and (almost) invariably ironic worldview. This selection of five orchestral pieces, taken from across his multifarious output, underlines why this most assaultive of rock musicians has posthumously become a composer with whom to reckon - ranging as it does from the sardonic schmaltz of Dog Breath Variations, via the Boulezian textural intricacy of The Perfect Stranger, to the big-band anarchy of Revised Music for Low Budget Orchestra. Famously intolerant of 'dumbing down' on whatever level, Zappa demands a commitment from his players

such as the Norwegian forces meet admirably. The sound is commendably detailed and upfront, though it is a pity that the stylishness of LAWO's presentation is rather compromised by the booklet-notes – superficial for Goebbels, wholly inadequate for Zappa. Richard Whitehouse

#### Guinioan

Percussion Concerto<sup>a</sup>. In tribulatione mea invocavi Dominum<sup>b</sup>. Pantonal<sup>c</sup> <sup>a</sup>Miquel Bernat perc <sup>b</sup>Palau Chamber Choir: bOrfeó Català; acCadaqués Orchestra/ <sup>c</sup>Sir Neville Marriner, <sup>a</sup>Jaime Martín; <sup>b</sup>Galicia Symphony Orchestra / Víctor Pablo Pérez Tritó (F) TD0103 (59' • DDD)



Born in 1931, Joan Guinjoan is one of Catalonia's most distinguished

composers, having been part of the establishment of what was then the avantgarde in Spain after his studies at the Schola Cantorum in France and founding the group Diabolus in Musica to that end. What was once avant-garde no longer seems so, of course; rather, Guinjoan is a representative of an established highmodernist tendency in Spain. This disc provides us with a survey of recent work.

His music is beautifully written, his facility with the orchestra (one of classical dimensions here) and his rather Gallic sense of colour evident at every turn. The Percussion Concerto plunges us into swathes of densely scored sound, from which single lines emerge intermittently, only to be swallowed up again, the timpani a constant, threatening presence, to be replaced by a wider variety of instruments, including marimba and vibraphone, when the mood changes - though the sense of threat does not abate. The central movement is mysterious and there is a reluctant lyricism in the solo writing that begins to infect the orchestra near the end; there is certainly a sense of a journey having been travelled, though still unfinished. Whether the final movement resolves that ambiguity is difficult to say. It is initially festive in feeling but gets caught up in yet another journey, complete with a cadenza that Miquel Bernat dispatches with magnificent aplomb, as he does the rest of the concerto, before rather suddenly deciding that it has run its course and coming to a buzzing close.

In tribulatione mea invocavi Dominum is scored for choir and orchestra but the two are nothing if not equal partners. It is quite different in character from the Percussion

Concerto, with far more melodic character. In any event, it has resulted in a striking work that more than occasionally glances backwards to parts of Stravinsky's Symphony of Psalms. The Cor de Cambra del Palau and the Orfeó Català are the choirs in this recording, and they do a superb job.

The style of *Pantonal* for orchestra, on the other hand, is initially more reminiscent of that of the Percussion Concerto but it gradually acquires an engaging dance-like character. A disc worth investigating; In tribulatione in particular is a hugely impressive work by a composer at the height of his powers.

Ivan Moody

#### Handel

Keyboard Concertos - No 13, 'The Cuckoo and the Nightingale', HWV295; No 14, HWV296; No 15, HWV304; No 16, HWV305a Matthias Kirschnereit of Deutsche Kammerakademie Neuss / Lavard Skou Larsen CPO (E) . CPO777 854-2 (56' • DDD/DSD)



Chronologically, these four concertos come between the first set of concertos published in

1738 as Op 4 (Nos 1-6) and the third set published in 1761 as Op 7 (Nos 7-12). In between came a second set of six (HWV295-300), published in 1740, of which only the first two were designed by Handel as organ concertos, for the remaining four were arrangements by an unknown hand of concerti grossi from Op 6. These are sometimes referred to as Nos 13-18. Nos 15-18 of this set are not included here. Instead, we have the two independent concertos (HWV304 and 305a) which are also sometimes known as Nos 15 and 16. Are you still with me?

As with the earlier disc from the same forces, which I had the pleasure of reviewing in February, this is musicmaking with a smile on its face, even if only No 13, The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, is on an equal level of inspiration with anything from the Opp 4 and 7 sets. Its allegro movements have a life-affirming charm, with the sparkling dialogue between soloist and orchestra batted back and forth with palpable glee, the larghettos reminding us that Handel wrote these concertos to be heard in conjunction with vocal works, ie his oratorios (in this case *Israel in Egypt*). Nos 15 and 16, not published until almost 40 years after Handel's death, have none of the memorable themes of the others but Larsen's skilful string phrasing of his (non-period) players and, above all,

Kirschnereit's mellow, lightly pedalled touch adorned with discreet, tasteful ornaments combine to make this disc one of pure joy. Jeremy Nicholas

#### Haydn · Mozart

'Jeunehomme'

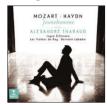
Haydn Piano Concerto, HobXVIII/11

Mozart Piano Concerto No 9, 'Jeunehomme',
K271. Rondo, K386. Ch'io mi scordi di te, K505<sup>a</sup>

Alexandre Tharaud pf a Joyce DiDonato mez

Les Violons du Roy / Bernard Labadie

Erato © 2564 62626-8 (71' • DDD)



Alexander Tharaud dives vigorously into the piano's unexpected entrance just a few

bars into the orchestral ritornello of Mozart's *Teunehomme* Concerto, pushing the tempo ever so slightly. Bernard Labadie and Les Violons du Roy continue on their own highly polished trajectory, not entirely avoiding those exaggerated feminine endings, oh-so-precious dynamic dips and threadbare string tone upon which period performers dote. The first-movement development section's exquisite harmonic tension and release elicits delicately wrought soloist/ensemble interplay. Don't expect any real bottom or strong woodwind profile within the slow movement's orchestral image vis-à-vis John Eliot Gardiner's English Baroque Soloists. Instead, concentrate on Tharaud's eloquent tone and refined *legato* finger technique. The finale's slow A flat major episode features sensitively placed pizzicatos and a dramatic transition back into the scampering main theme.

In the A major Rondo, the orchestral execution flip-flops between mushy *legato* and exaggerated *détaché* articulation, in contrast to Gardiner's clearly aligned strands. Haydn's D major Concerto stands out for Tharaud's poised pianism and stylish wit, and his extensive, imaginative first-movement cadenza offers one delight after another. But, again, the orchestra's outsize third-movement accents and emaciated string timbre in the slow movement cannot compare to the Manchester Camerata's superior balances and expressive palette in their recent recording with Jean-Efflam Bavouzet.

Fortunately, the ensemble find their centre in support of Joyce DiDonato at the peak of her form in Mozart's great K505 concert aria. Her impeccable intonation no matter how decorative the passagework, her effortless agility in all registers and her genius for word-painting (together with

Tharaud's vibrant and eloquently shaded piano obbligato) are worth the price of this disc. Jed Distler

Mozart K271, K386 – selected comparison:
Bilson, EBS, Gardiner
(4/84<sup>R</sup>, 6/87<sup>R</sup>) (ARCH) 463 111-2AB9
Haydn – selected comparison:
Bavouzet, Manchester Camerata, Takács-Nagy
(9/14) (CHAN) CHAN10808

#### Haydn

'Complete Symphonies, Vol 22'
Symphonies - No 98; No 103, 'Drumroll'
Heidelberg Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Fey
Hänssler Classic (© CD98 031 (59' • DDD)



Well over halfway through his cycle by now, Thomas Fey alights on two

'London' Symphonies, one from each of Haydn's visits to the British capital. And while there may be less that's new to say in these ever-popular later works than in some of the less well-known earlier ones, it remains clear that Fey has thought carefully about (nearly) every note and phrase. It's whether you the listener respond positively or negatively to his ideas and solutions that can often be the rub in his recordings.

Fev's teachers, Bernstein and Harnoncourt, are perhaps the yin and yang of Haydn performance but their influence combines in readings that push for maximum individuality. So expect highly inflected phrasing, brash brass and elongated pauses; notice also how the brass- (and bass-) heavy sound picture underlines an almost Beethovenian impulse to the symphonic conception of No 98's first movement. The slow movement, too, is swifter, Fey relishing the motivic working of the piece in preference to any sentimental notion that it was written on Haydn's learning of Mozart's death. The humour in the finale is (appropriately) of the beery, Austrian kind rather than the more urbane, genteel wit displayed elsewhere, and a tinkling fortepiano is reserved for the very end of the work.

The *Drumroll*, too, is dramatically conceived, from its opening tattoo (à la Harnoncourt and Minkowski) to a finale which is held back a touch to allow maximum contrast in *tutti* sections. Clarinets are a cheekily insolent presence in the three movements in which they are deployed, although the only movement in which they remain silent, the *Andante*'s variations, is the one section where Fey's mind seems to wander off the point. Minuet speeds continue to surprise: that of

No 98 is pushed forwards, while the *Drumroll*'s is kept at a Dorati-like slow *allegretto*. Repeated listenings have endeared this approach to me: it allows those all-important clarinets to make their maximum effect in the Trio. Where next for Fey and his Heidelbergers?

David Threasher

#### Milford · Stanford · Holst

'The Fire That Breaks From Thee'
Holst Walt Whitman Overture, Op 7
Milford Violin Concerto, Op 47<sup>a</sup>
Stanford Violin Concerto No 2, Op 162<sup>a</sup>
<sup>a</sup>Rupert Marshall-Luck VII
BBC Concert Orchestra / Owain Arwel Hughes
EM Records ® EMRCDO23 (76' • DDD)



Completed in August 1918 but mysteriously left in short score, Stanford's Second

Violin Concerto lasts just under half an hour and is performed here in Jeremy Dibble's outstandingly idiomatic orchestration from 2011 (which, in its modest instrumentation and tasteful restraint, looks to the example of the composer's First Violin Concerto and Clarinet Concerto). This is a wonderfully fluent, warm-hearted creation, boasting a resourcefully worked and confidently plotted opening movement that leads without a break into the concerto's gently nostalgic Andante centrepiece (full of tenderness and unmistakably Irish in flavour). A spirited rondo finale rounds off proceedings in style. Dashingly committed treatment it enjoys, too, from Rupert Marshall-Luck, who receives uncommonly fine support from Owain Arwel Hughes at the helm of the BBC Concert Orchestra.

By comparison, Robin Milford's 1937 Concerto wears an altogether more rhapsodic, wayward demeanour, which is not to decry its far-flung ambition, lyrical ardour and intrepid expressive scope. Storm clouds build menacingly during the slow movement and reappear for the piece's darkly troubled close. To my mind, this powerfully affecting 38-minute canvas undoubtedly constitutes a major find, and lovers of the English pastoral tradition (and RVW, Howells and Finzi in particular) should lose no time in making its acquaintance. The present artists do Milford absolutely proud, it must be said, while Holst's very early Walt Whitman Overture from 1899 (with its shameless cribbing from Brahms and Wagner) forms a vivid curtain-raiser to the whole programme.

EM Records' admirable production values and copiously detailed presentation further enhance the considerable claims of this bold venture. Plaudits and gratitude to all concerned. Andrew Achenbach

#### **Mahler**





Symphony No 5

Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra / Riccardo Chailly
Accentus ⑤ ♣ ACC20284; ⑥ ♠ ACC10284
(74' + 28' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA,
DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0)

Video director Henning Kasten

Recorded live, February 21 & 22, 2013 Bonus: Riccardo Chailly on his interpretation of Mahler's Fifth Symphony



A 27-minute bonus feature finds Riccardo Chailly discussing his interpretation of Mahler's Fifth

Symphony, a useful guide to both the symphony and his personal view of the work. You must watch it but make sure to experience the performance first, which differs from Chailly's 1997 Concertgebouw recording (Decca, 4/98) in a number of key respects, in particular the second

movement's added drive, the way the Scherzo takes on extra degrees of colour (always a key attribute on Chailly's best recordings) and, in particular, the way the Adagietto unfolds in seamless paragraphs, swiftly, unselfconsciously and with subtly voiced expression. At one point in the DVD feature Chailly listens to Willem Mengelberg's 1926 Concertgebouw recording of the same movement - still the swiftest ever made - and you can tell by his reaction that the experience fits more or less exactly with his view of how the movement should sound. Granted, Mengelberg's vintage strings sport portamentos that are a good deal more prominent than anything we're likely to hear nowadays (although Chailly isn't averse to using them, albeit more sparingly), but fluency is the thing, which is why the producers were able to effect a telling demonstration of musical continuity by seamlessly segueing from Mengelberg to Chailly almost as if the passage of time doesn't exist. Needless to say, Chailly's Concertgebouw Adagietto is a good deal slower than this Leipzig remake.

Maher's Fifth comes packaged in three parts, the first two movements pitting the sardonic tread of a funeral march that erupts midway against a vehement second movement. You'll need to take my word for it that the similarity to Webern at the fragmented close of the second movement struck my imagination before Chailly pointed it out but one might have expected that this master of Mahler's musical 'children', the Second Viennese School and the like, would pick up on the connection. What's also for sure is the handsome state of the Gewandhaus Orchestra under Chailly's leadership, their responsiveness to his direction and the overall warmth of their sound. Chailly takes us on a journey from darkness to light, even comparing the symphony's closing bars with Offenbach (Mahler was a great fan, apparently).

The sound quality is first-rate, always transparent but with a rich bass-line (ie the harp and basses in the *Adagietto*), the camerawork largely unobtrusive and more often than not focusing on Chailly himself. He's a pleasure to watch, being neither over-demonstrative nor affectedly matter-of-fact. He looks like what he's conducting and one senses that the orchestra agrees. If the rest of this projected second Chailly Mahler cycle is as good as this, then I suspect we have treats aplenty in store.

Rob Cowan



#### Mozart

Piano Concertos - No 18, K456; No 19, K459 **The Cleveland Orchestra / Mitsuko Uchida** pf

Decca (£) 478 6763DH (61' • DDD)

Recorded live at Severance Hall, Cleveland, OH,

April 1-5, 2014



In a sense the images on the front and back of the disc say it all: this is Mozart of

extraordinary intensity, as you might expect from Dame Mitsuko. The latest instalment, in which she directs The Cleveland Orchestra from the keyboard, pairs two delectable concertos, if ones less compulsively recorded than the miraculous sequence of 1785-86.

The guileless beginning of the B flat Concerto, K456, gives little hint of the extraordinary depths that are to be explored, most notably in the searing G minor variation-form slow movement. This is predictably rapt in Uchida's hands: if her earlier version with the ECO and Tate was reactive, this is still more so, the whispered asides now even more daringly withdrawn. What's striking is that The Cleveland – for all the warmth of the strings – sounds like a smaller band than the ECO, so intimate is the experience.

Mozart has been a constant throughout Uchida's career but increasingly palpable is an otherworldly quality to her playing, an aspect that radiates out to her fellow players and to us, the audience. Her reading as a whole in this movement is more profoundly disturbed than most (if it's too much, Richard Goode offers a wonderfully pliant and plangent alternative). Her finale – steadier than many – suggests that all is not as carefree as may at first seem; and the balance as a whole is less wind-focused than, for example, Goode's Orpheus or Andsnes's period-leaning, vibrato-light Norwegian Chamber Orchestra.

In the *Allegretto* central movement of the F major, too, Uchida is very compelling, imbuing the piano's glorious lines with a haze of melancholy. Again the wind are less prominent than tends to be the norm nowadays, which occasionally seems a pity when the playing is as outstanding as it is here. The finale is ravishingly brought off, the repartee between piano and orchestra in the final bars delightful in its sense of playful affirmation. Harriet Smith

Pf Concs – selected comparison:

Uchida, ECO, Tate (7/90<sup>R</sup>, 6/06) (PHIL) 475 7306PB8 K456 – selected comparisons:

Goode, Orpheus CO (4/97) (NONE) 7559 79439-2 Andsnes, Norwegian CO (12/04) (EMI) 557803-2 K459 – selected comparison: Goode, Orpheus CO (A/00) (NONE) 7559 79608-2

#### Napoleão · Oswald

'The Romantic Piano Concerto, Vol 64' Napoleão Piano Concerto No 2, Op 31 Oswald Piano Concerto, Op 10 Artur Pizarro pf BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Martyn Brabbins
Hyperion © CDA67984 (67' • DDD)



Allow me to introduce a couple of composers of whom not one in ten thousand, I guess,

not even dedicated pianophiles, will have encountered. Even the mighty Wikipedia can only summon a few brief lines on each. I am indebted to Nancy Lee Harper's informative booklet for details. Brazilian Henrique Oswald (1852-1931) studied in Italy and played frequently in Europe before returning to spend most of the latter part of his life in Rio de Janeiro. Some readers may have encountered Artur Napoleão (1843-1925) from his association with Louis Moreau Gottschalk and as a successful music publisher. He was the brother of Alfredo (1852-1917) who, after early studies in London, made a name for himself in South America, eventually returning to Portugal, his native country.

Whether Oswald's Concerto, dating from around 1886, is strong or appealing enough to earn him a higher profile is a moot point. It has a first movement full of fire and brimstone but lacks any memorable themes or a cohesive structure; the lyrical *Adagio* offers only hints of why Arthur Rubinstein dubbed Oswald 'the Brazilian Gabriel Fauré'. This leads, *attacca*, into an arresting tarantella which goes some way to redeeming an otherwise faceless, if richly orchestrated, addition to Hyperion's iconic series.

The concerto by Napoleão (or Napoleon) is considerably and consistently more interesting, not least for its key. (I read that young Daniil Trifonov has just premiered his own E flat minor Concerto, but are there any others?) The lengthy (19'53") first movement, with its atmospheric *misterioso* opening, makes it clear that he knew his Chopin and Liszt, while the first subject of the brief *Scherzo* owes much to Litolff (though not its flaccid second subject). Had Gottschalk ever written a piano concerto, the boisterous finale might have been the result. This is a concerto that grows on the listener.

All of which leaves little space to celebrate Artur Pizarro's playing of both

works. One cannot imagine them more convincingly and sincerely executed. What verve and flair he brings to the staminasapping solos, and with what graceful lyricism he invests the *cantabile* writing. He is only the third pianist to champion the Napoleão concerto. Interestingly, as a child he studied with Evaristo de Campos Coelho (1903-88), who gave the work its first performance in 1941, over half a century after its composition. Jeremy Nicholas

#### **Panufnik**

'Symphonic Works, Vol 8'

Violin Concerto<sup>a</sup>. Cello Concerto<sup>b</sup>.
Piano Concerto<sup>c</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Alexander Sitkovetsky vn

<sup>b</sup>Raphael Wallfisch vc <sup>c</sup>Ewa Kupiec pf

Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz

CPO © CPO777 687-2 (66' • DDD)



This disc contains some of Panufnik's most intriguing music. The three concertos

come from a wide chronological span, the Piano Concerto being the earliest, from 1963 (though it was revised twice), the Cello Concerto the latest, dating from 1991, the year of the composer's death, with the Violin Concerto in the middle, having been written in 1971.

The Violin Concerto, written for Yehudi Menuhin, is given a gripping account by Alexander Sitkovetsky; he does not underplay its darkness but neither does he miss its soaring, aspirational quality, especially in the remarkable second movement, or let up the tension, and in this he is aided and abetted in outstanding fashion by the Berlin Konzerthaus Orchestra. There is darkness also in the Cello Concerto, Panufnik's last composition, written for Rostropovich; indeed, it seems to emerge from the Stygian gloom, only gradually assuming presence, but it is also a work of aspiration, the solo line climbing ever higher, like a tendril searching for the light. It is a twomovement work, comprising an Adagio and a hugely gripping Vivace, and as usual with Panufnik is based on geometrical design, in this case the mandorla. Raphael Wallfisch's performance is electric.

The Piano Concerto was certainly the right choice to end this disc, if one listens to it straight through: it's an exuberant, colourful work, premiered in its final form by John Ogdon in 1983. One of the composer's aims was to give a really significant role to the orchestra, and this is certainly the case, though at the same time

there is no gainsaying the work's status as a genuine, virtuoso concerto. The intimate, fragile second movement is surely one of Panufnik's most original creations. Again, the performance by orchestra and soloist – here Ewa Kupiec – is outstanding, under the sure guidance of Łukasz Borowicz, and beautifully recorded. Ivan Moody

#### **Pickard**

Eden. Symphony No 4, 'Gaia Symphony'

Eikanger-Bjørsvik Musikklag / Andreas Hanson

BIS (P) . BIS2061 (81' • DDD/DSD)



John Pickard's hour-long Fourth Symphony, composed in stages between 1991

and 2003, is scored for brass band. An hour-long symphony for brass band: how is that even performable? Its clever design punctuates the four principal movements, written and premiered separately, by three 'Windows' for six percussionists. The whole continuous structure therefore comprises seven movements, although the concluding 'Men of Stone' is itself a suite of four movements (inspired by British stone circles), so could be in 10.

'Wildfire' - which became the scherzo (placed second) – came first in 1991, followed by 'Men of Stone' (1995), the opening 'Tsunami' (2001) and slow movement 'Aurora' (2002); the linking 'Windows' were added in 2003. For all the technical resource evident in knitting these disparate elements so convincingly together - and this is a hugely convincing, gripping symphony – the expressive intent is grippingly achieved, comprising overlapping cycles of the seasons and four elements. Despite its long gestation, the musical style is consistent throughout, recognisably the Pickard of the orchestral symphonies and string quartets, although there are fleeting reminiscences of the brass-writing of Simpson and McCabe, even Bernstein at one stage in 'Wildfire'.

Eden (2005) also has an ecological frame of reference, at least partly from the Eden project in Cornwall (though primarily from Paradise Lost), although its 'message' is less positivist than in the Gaia Symphony, and hard-won at that. Written as a test piece for the National Brass Band Championships, it is a brilliantly virtuoso three-in-one design, broadly slow-fast-slow. The Norwegian championship-winning Eikander-Bjørsvik Musikklag is simply stunning. Sensational sound from BIS. Guy Rickards

#### **Prokofiev** · Tchaikovsky

Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 3, Op 26<sup>a</sup>
Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23<sup>a</sup>.
Dance of the Four Swans (transcr E Wild)
Behzod Abduraimov pf aRAI National
Symphony Orchestra / Juraj Valcuha
Decca ® 478 5360DH (64' • DDD)



Behzod Abduraimov was an unknown 18-year-old when he won the 2009 London

International Piano Competition with a sensational performance of Prokofiev's Third Piano Concerto. He has chosen the same work to open his debut concerto recording. This is a reading that does not set out to astonish or bludgeon but is more in keeping with the friendly, smiling portraits of the young soloist on the disc's booklet. Though there is no lack of spirit in this acutely observed interpretation, Prokofiev's lemony, brittle writing is given the milk-and-honey treatment with a velvet-cushioned tone. Listen, for instance, to the spiky brass declamations of the theme in Var 11 of the second movement, polite comments compared to Graffman and Szell's acidic snarls, while Var 3 benefits from a more virile attack in the hands of Gramophone Award-winners Jean-Efflam Bayouzet and Gianandrea Noseda. Don't misunderstand: this is a fine account but, I think, altogether too genial.

Similarly, Abduraimov's take on Tchaikovsky's ubiquitous B flat minor Concerto is not of the adversarial and confrontational kind. If he plays down the heroics, there is much to admire in this well-integrated performance and his intimate rapport with the orchestra. Listen out for the delightful murmurings of the muted violas and cellos after the fermata at 8'56" and the second subject of the slow movement, flagging up without undue emphasis the subject of the central prestissimo section. If this version doesn't set the spine a-tingling, there is much to savour in this most thoughtful and musical account. The two concertos are separated by a charming, feather-light account of the Pas de quatre from Swan Lake in Earl Wild's transcription. Jeremy Nicholas

Prokofiev – selected comparison: Graffman, Cleveland Orch, Szell (1/67<sup>R</sup>, 1/14) (SONY) 88725 46239-2 Bavouzet, BBC PO, Noseda (3/14) (CHAN) CHAN10802

#### Rachmaninov · Rimsky-Korsakov

Elgar Salut d'amour, Op 12<sup>a</sup> Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2, Op 18<sup>b</sup>. Symphonic Dances<sup>a</sup>.



gramophone.co.uk

Etude-tableau, Op 39 No 2°. Prelude, Op 32 No 12° **Rimsky-Korsakov** Sheherazade, Op 35° **Verdi** La forza del destino – Overture° bcDenis Matsuev pf abSt Petersburg Philharmonic Orchestra / Yuri Temirkanov

EuroArts ( ≥ 207 5068; ( ≥ 207 5064 (150' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • PCM stereo • 0) Recorded live at the Annecy Classic Festival 2013



One of the particular pleasures of this filmed concert is watching the avuncular maestro Yuri

Temirkanov direct a group of players who know his every gesture so intimately. What wonderful and subtle effects he can achieve with the absolute minimum – less is more – and the sound he produces seems to reflect his podium personality.

The programme begins with Denis Matsuev in what is now one of his signature pieces. Rachmaninov's Second Piano Concerto is given an urgent, passionate reading from the outset, with the pianist's left hand like a tolling bell underneath the first statement of that magnificent opening theme. Matsuev, like the composer, is not one to linger but takes the second movement even faster than Rachmaninov (10'12" as opposed to 10'40", a far cry from Ashkenazy's 11'53" and Richter's 11'47") such a heart-melting melody does not need to be over-egged to achieve an effect. The last movement is simply breathtaking, with the most difficult passage of the concerto thrown off at speed and with thrilling precision. Matsuev hurls himself into the cadenza and the blistering conclusion. Two mellow Rachmaninov encores underline his credentials as one of the composer's greatest living exponents.

Rachmaninov's last work, the Symphonic Dances, and Rimsky's Sheherazade follow. The unnamed Annecy venue has not the most resonant of acoustics and it is greatly to Temirkanov's credit that he conjures up such a lush string sound from his players, with violins either side, cellos in front. Wind solos, particularly the saxophone, oboe and first horn, are expertly balanced without any artificial highlighting and, though I have heard Sheherazade's violin solo played more sweetly, the showstopping 'Festival at Baghdad' is dispatched with irresistible panache. Even more affecting, perhaps surprisingly, is the encore: Elgar's Salut d'amour. Temirkanov phrases this with such affectionate care that the piece is elevated from hackneyed salon Victoriana to miniature tone-poem.

All in all, with *The Force of Destiny* Overture as a bonus and a generous

150 minutes' running time, this is one of the better DVDs of its kind. Jeremy Nicholas

#### Rossini

Overtures - La scala di seta; Il Signor Bruschino; Il barbiere di Siviglia; La Cenerentola; Semiramide; Le siège de Corinthe; Guillaume Tell. Andante e tema con variazioni

Orchestra of the Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia / Sir Antonio Pappano

Warner Classics (F) 2564 62434-4 (70' • DDD)



This is a curious anthology. The performances of the two early overtures

La scala di seta and Il Signor Bruschino are a delight: the meticulously prepared Santa Cecilia winds and strings songful and dancing on points. And the overture to La Cenerentola is similarly blessed. The overture to Il barbiere di Siviglia is more conventionally done. Nor is the leap from 1816 to 1823 – the Naples years during which Rossini's orchestrations took on a new range and power – especially well registered in an account of the Semiramide overture whose rhythmic carriage is more suggestive of an early farsa than a later melodramma tragico.

The one rarity here is the overture to Le siège de Corinthe, the revision of the Neapolitan epic Maometto II which Rossini made for the Paris Opéra in 1826. There is a Toscanini recording of this, one of the maestro's more hair-raising essays in musical terrorism, which is almost as incendiary as the holocaust with which the opera ends. Pappano's performance is vivid but a good deal more humane.

With a running time of just 70 minutes, we might have expected the overture to *L'italiana in Algeri* or *La gazza ladra* to be included here as well. As it is, an hour of overtures is rounded out with a 10-minute set of variations for flute, clarinet, horn and bassoon. Charming rarity though it is, it's a rum way to end to a disc entitled 'Rossini Overtures'. Richard Osborne

#### Shostakovich

Violin Concertos - No 1, Op 77; No 2, Op 129 Christian Tetzlaff vn Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra / John Storgårds Ondine ® ODE1239-2 (68' • DDD)



Christian Tetzlaff may be the only frontranking soloist to have recorded all Sibelius's output for violin and orchestra but then he has also set down the *Voces intimae* string quartet with his own eponymous quartet. No surprise then to discover him playing Shostakovich's chamber works in concert and on disc, and electing now to record both Shostakovich concertos where many latter-day rivals look no further than the First. In scores written expressly for the great David Oistrakh, it is perhaps inevitable that older hands tend to seek out performances embracing comparable emotional authenticity and a big tone. That said, the best post-Soviet champions are already taking this music in new directions.

Tetzlaff provides a different kind of experience from that of Russian-trained practitioners like Maxim Vengerov. Using a modern instrument by Stefan-Peter Greiner, plus a brace of bows, the German virtuoso makes the piece his own in leaner, anti-rhetorical fashion. While the opening 'Nocturne' of the First Concerto moves a tad more swiftly than some will like, his less insistent vibrato inhabits a dreamy moonlit landscape, rather than one freighted with personal memories of life behind the Iron Curtain. Harp, celesta and subterranean tam-tam strokes are plainly audible. In the Scherzo his normally immaculate tonal profile is deliberately roughed up in an attempt to create the requisite sense of strain. Nor is there any lack of intensity in the aspiring/oppressive 'Passacaglia' where John Storgårds and the Helsinki Philharmonic Orchestra are more linear or analytical partners than, say, Rostropovich's LSO for Vengerov. The finale doesn't exactly go like the wind until its closing stages. Still, there's nothing overly cerebral about it. The sound recording, made in the new Helsinki Music Centre, admits plenty of light even with the soloist discreetly spotlit.

The Second Concerto is at least as persuasive, its slow movement bringing some breathtaking shafts of radiance amid the prevailing gloom. Warmly recommended as a supplement to brawnier, more oppressive readings.

#### David Gutman

Selected comparison:
Vengerov, LSO, Rostropovich
(2/95<sup>R</sup>, A/97<sup>R</sup>) (WARN) 2564 68039-7

#### **Shostakovich**

Symphonies - No 6, Op 54<sup>a</sup>; No 14, Op 135<sup>b</sup>

baratiana Monogarova sop bSergei Leiferkus bar
London Philharmonic Orchestra /
Vladimir Jurowski

LPO M LPO0080 (78' • DDD)

Recorded live at the <sup>b</sup>Queen Elizabeth Hall,
London, February 18, 2006; <sup>a</sup>Royal Festival Hall,
May 17, 2013

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It is 10 years since Vladimir Jurowski previously recorded Shostakovich's Sixth

with the indigenous musicians of the Russian National Orchestra in a Moscow studio. And the good news is that their London rivals play it every bit as well. The new performance, captured live in May 2013 at the Royal Festival Hall, is not SACD-encoded but sounds less desiccated than might have been expected. While Shostakovich's great opening *Largo* is kept on the move (Kondrashin style), the production team fabricates ample sonic legroom. It helps too that first and second violins are placed antiphonally (Mravinsky would have approved). Some will nonetheless prefer the spaciousness of Vasily Petrenko who, like Bernstein before him, takes seriously an opening metronome mark that risks allowing the music to collapse into stasis. Jurowski meanwhile pushes powerfully through the scherzo as well, never overstating incidental detail. The finale struck me as again more than usually earnest, the aim being presumably

to boost the symphonic credentials of the work itself rather than to evoke an illogical and contradictory Soviet reality.

The boot is on the other foot in the Fourteenth. Here Petrenko's team creates an incendiary effect not quite matched by Jurowski, comparably brisk as he is in February 2006, directing what sounds like a similarly reduced, not overly polished string complement in the smaller Queen Elizabeth Hall. Though Petrenko's vouthful male soloist, Alexander Vinogradov, is not billed as a bass, his low notes are firmer than those of Jurowski's veteran baritone, the predictably authoritative - and tonally parched - Sergei Leiferkus. Tatiana Monogarova is splendid, however, applying 21st-century poise and discipline to the timbre and attitude of the old-style Russian dramatic soprano. Not since Galina Vishnevskaya have I heard quite such committed singing in this extraordinary music. Applause is retained after the Sixth, the Fourteenth wisely left hanging in the air. Strongly recommended, with the proviso that those who invested in Volume 3 of the LPO's '75th Anniversary Box Set' will already have the earlier rendition. David Gutman

Sym No 6 – selected comparisons:

Russian Nat Orch, Jurowski (7/06) (PENT) PTC5186 068
RLPO, Petrenko (12/11) (NAXO) 8 572658
Sym No 14 – selected comparisons:
Vishnevskaya, Reshetin, Moscow Acad SO, Rostropovich
(12/75<sup>R</sup>) (WARN) B 2564 64177-2
James, Vinogradov, RLPO, Petrenko
(6/14) (NAXO) 8 573132

#### **R Strauss**

Also sprach Zarathustra, Op 30.
Don Juan, Op 20. Vier letzte Lieder<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Erin Wall sop Melbourne Symphony
Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis
ABC Classics © ABC481 1122 (74' • DDD)
Recorded live at Hamer Hall, Arts Centre
Melbourne, May 2013, July 2014



These performances add to the impressive array of repertoire combined with the

Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's mix of versatility and excellence manifest in the ABC Classics releases reviewed here in August. Those had various different conductors but here the orchestra's chief is in charge for one of the composers he knows best, Richard Strauss.



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The centrepiece is a beautifully modulated, sensitively and sensuously soaring interpretation of the Four Last Songs by Erin Wall. Here, too, Davis reveals his understanding of the Straussian orchestral fabric with a judiciously balanced spectrum of timbres, the horn solo in 'September', for example, or the violin in 'Beim Schlafengehen' finding their natural place within the orchestral perspective. On either side of the Four Last Songs, Davis conducts Don Juan and Also sprach Zarathustra. The Don Juan lifts off with terrific confidence and swagger but Davis also has full measure of the music's narrative pulse as the symphonic poem proceeds, with all the passion, poignancy and dramatic peaks drawn together in a seamlessly conceived performance. Acoustical breadth and warmth in the Hamer Hall is a notable asset at the start of Also sprach Zarathustra, where the grandeur of Strauss's opening gesture is given ample space to assert itself. Thereafter, the quality that again comes through in this performance is its fine blend of subtlety, strength and spontaneity. Geoffrey Norris

#### Szymanowski

Violin Concertos<sup>a</sup> - No 1, Op 35; No 2, Op 61. Three Myths, Op 30<sup>b</sup> Baiba Skride vn <sup>b</sup>Lauma Skride pf <sup>a</sup>Oslo Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko Orfeo © C873 141A (66' • DDD)



When it comes to recording Szymanowski's violin concertos, given a

first-rate soloist, orchestra and conductor, a decent hall, a sympathetic team of engineers and an all-round understanding of Szymanowski's exotic sound world, the likely upshot is a differing slant on what we already know rather than an outright revelation. The First Concerto in particular is so crammed full of incident that surveying the best of available modern versions (Zehetmair, Danczowska, Zimmermann, Steinbacher, Tetzlaff and so on) is like viewing as many lithe athletes doing the same routines with subtle variation but equal expertise. Baiba Skride easily holds her own in such illustrious company, her tone silvery bright, her responses to Vasily Petrenko's alert (but never spiky) accompaniment quick off the mark. The lyrical aspects of the work and there are many - are conveyed with a winning sense of poetry: try track 2, Tempo comodo, where Skride's tender inflections are matched by parallel levels of warmth

from the orchestra. A notably rich-textured recording helps, though when the focus needs to hold the soloist near centre stage (as in part 3), the balance allows her due prominence. Frank Peter Zimmermann's recording with the Warsaw Philharmonic Orchestra under Antoni Wit (Sony) has marginally more ambience but in part 4, where the violin all but becomes Salome's sibling (you can almost see the veils fall), Skride's sweet, sinewy playing has the edge. Both offer an exceptional reading of the cadenza.

The Szymanowski of the darker Second Concerto is no longer the carrier of delicate and decorative filigree, which was very much the province of the First. The first section forms the nucleus of the piece, while the scherzo is in the manner of a peasant dance. Szymanowski's Second Violin Concerto takes folk music on board while fulfilling the role of symphonyconcerto. Sample tr 8 (Allegramente) where the peasant-like dancing emphases make their full effect and Skride's playing is at its most gutsy. Turn to Zimmermann and aside from hearing more of the side drum and enjoying a wider dynamic range, the acoustic is more open and the solo playing marginally more urbane.

Either coupling of the concertos would serve as a front-ranking library recommendation (as, in all honesty, would Thomas Zehetmair and Sir Simon Rattle on EMI) but makeweights will likely prove crucial. Sony offers a superb version of Britten's Violin Concerto, whereas Orfeo completes its disc with the sisters Baiba and Lauma Skride in a winningly atmospheric reading of Szymanowski's Three Myths for violin and piano, Op 30, the closing 'Dryades et Pan' being the highlight of the performance, Baiba Skride employing an extraordinarily wide range of tone colours and effects (whistling harmonics, groaning double-stops, etc). Memories of Kaja Danczowska and Krystian Zimerman (DG) aren't entirely erased but the vivid playfulness of the Skride sisters has a compelling intensity all its own. Leaving couplings aside, on the critical front it's very much a case of 'even stevens'.

#### **Rob Cowan**

Vn Concs – selected comparisons: Zebetmair, CBSO, Rattle (8/96<sup>R</sup>) (EMI) 514576-2 FP Zimmermann, Warsaw PO, Wit (A/09) (SONY) 88697 43999-2

 $Myths-selected\ comparison:$ 

Danczowska, K Zimerman (6/81<sup>R</sup>) (DG) 477 5903GOR

#### **Tchaikovsky**

Symphony No 6, 'Pathétique', Op 74 **Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Philippe Jordan** Wiener Symphoniker (F) WS006 (46' • DDD) Recorded live at the Musikverein, Vienna, December 14 & 15, 2013



By the time you read this, Philippe Jordan (son of the muchmissed Armin) will

have taken up the reins as the Vienna Symphony's new Principal Conductor, and there's no gainsaying that this live *Pathétique* possesses many solid virtues. Jordan conducts with innate musicality and sound judgement, and his eminently clear-sighted and totally unmannered reading is clearly the result of some meticulous preparation. What's more, he has a lively ear, moulds phrases with imagination and care, and draws some strikingly alert, personable and beautifully blended playing from his new Viennese charges.

However, by the side of, say, Andris Nelsons and the CBSO or Yannick Nézet-Séguin and the Rotterdam PO, the musicmaking doesn't quite attain lift-off, lacking something in interpretative incident, sheer temperament and strength of character. The Allegro con grazia second movement has elegance and polish to spare but drags its feet just a little in the doleful B minor second subject. By contrast, the scherzo benefits from being cannily paced (I do find Nézet-Séguin just a tad hasty and flashy here), though if I'm being honest there simply isn't quite the same giddy sense of mounting excitement that Nelsons certainly manages to convey in his live Birmingham account. Still, the finale is strong and noble, all the more moving for its element of understatement, yet rising to a genuinely powerful pitch of intensity at its devastating fff apex at fig K or 6'47". Admirers of this particular partnership will doubtless need to no prompting to acquire; the majority, I suspect, may not be so easily persuaded. Andrew Achenbach

Selected comparisons:

CBSO, Nelsons (5/11) (ORFE) C832 101A Rotterdam PO, Nézet-Séguin (12/13) (DG) 479 0835GH

#### **B** Tchaikovsky

Piano Quintet<sup>a</sup>. The War Suite<sup>b</sup>
<sup>a</sup>Olga Solovieva pf <sup>b</sup>Maxim Anisimov Cl
Vanbrugh Quartet

Naxos ® 8 573207 (67' • DDD)



Boris Tchaikovsky (no relation) is hardly top of anyone's hit parade but that soft spot

I have for his music continues to get softer

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Objet trouvé: Albrecht Mayer revives four 'found' concertos for double-reed instruments on his new album for Decca (review on page 38)

and more needy. On the surface, the Piano Quintet Tchaikovsky wrote in 1962 behaves like any self-respecting four-movement chamber work by a Russian composer, who knew and was admired by Shostakovich, should. A perpetually rotating melodic line spelt out via octave unisons in the piano's tenor register sets out the terrain, with the occasional chromatic smudge telling you to watch out. But nothing prepares you for the deeply oddball introduction to the finale. Isolated piano clusters are marooned in space. The string quartet play recognisably tonal material but sound like they are trying to solve an enigmatic mathematical equation. Tchaikovsky shatters the fourth wall.

Tchaikovsky's other favoured technique is to flood nakedly tonal material with unpredictable waves of chromaticism: what was rigidly stable gradually slips towards instability as tonal centres are shaken out of their harmonic certainty. The Vanburgh Quartet and pianist Olga Solovieva put real intellectual muscle behind the physical weight of their playing. Tchaikovsky's third-movement *Scherzo* sweats nervously, its irritated rhythms hoping to bed down in a groove that Tchaikovsky continually denies them; the Vanburghs keep the music pulled psychologically taut.

The War Suite was assembled by Elena Astafieva and Stanislav Prokudin as a concert suite from music Tchaikovsky wrote for a 1964 film, While the Front is in Defence. As a sequence of vibrantly sketched character pieces it's pretty good – but the Piano Quintet soon called me back for a second listen. Philip Clark

#### **BA Zimmermann**

Alagoana. Sinfonie in einem Satz. Photoptosis. Stille und Umkehr Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz / Karl-Heinz Steffens

Capriccio (F) C5213 (69' • DDD)



That's a digger on the cover of this CD, but not just any digger. Look closely and

you'll see caterpillar tracks, those earthtreading ridges which allow the machine extra leverage to pummel the ground with unrelenting force – a fitting visual metaphor for the music of German composer Bernd Alois Zimmermann.

Recent releases of Zimmermann's music have tended to group around the extraordinary vocal music he composed

shortly before his suicide in 1970, and this disc features the orchestral music he was writing alongside and usefully plugs the historical gaps. *Photoptosis*, subtitled 'Prelude for Grand Orchestra' (1968), is usually considered Zimmermann's defining work but never has it sounded so rawboned and unrelenting: kudos to the Deutsche Staatsphilharmonie Rheinland-Pfalz and Karl-Heinz Steffens for pulling off such a chancy, intrepid performance.

The work of Yves Klein, the artist who flooded his images with his own selfinvented kind of blue, led Zimmermann to think about a piece that could find timbral variety within monochrome colour. The beginning is anchored around the harmonic interference provoked by a wobbling semitone before the music plunges towards a time-warp of barely concealed quotes: Beethoven's Ninth pummelling the earth, digging out space where memories of Bach, Tchaikovsky and Scriabin can be laid to rest. Having primed a white canvas, it's time to start painting again - with quotation which melts towards purist whole-tone harmony.

This final section is controlled with exceptional perspicacity by Steffens, who moves colour around as if sound itself has become a resonant pigment in his hands.

Zimmermann's *Stille und Umkehr* (written in 1970 – not 1927 as the booklet states) is another monochrome study that deals up a paradox: a jazz drummer attempts to assert time as the orchestra remains stubbornly motionless. *Alagoana* is an early ballet score that shows Zimmermann's eager ear for pastiche; *Sinfonie in einem Satz* (1953) finds him playing with the residue of serialism, and breaking for the borders. **Philip Clark** 

#### **Nelson Freire**

'Radio Days - The Concerto Broadcasts, 1968-1979'

**Chopin** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 11<sup>a</sup> **Liszt** Piano Concerto No 2, S125<sup>b</sup> **Prokofiev** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 10<sup>c</sup> **Rachmaninov** Piano Concerto No 3, Op 30<sup>d</sup> **Schumann** Concert Allegro with Introduction, Op 134<sup>e</sup> **Tchaikovsky** Piano Concerto No 1, Op 23<sup>f</sup>

Nelson Freire pr'bc Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / 'Yuri Ahronovitch, Eleazar de Carvalho, 'Reinhard Peters; a'NDR Symphony Orchestra / Heinz Wallberg; 'ORTF Philharmonic Orchestra / Kurt Masur; a'Rotterdam Philharmonic Orchestra / David Zinman

Decca B 2 478 6772DX2 (159' • ADD)



These recordings of live broadcasts dating from 1968-79 tell us in no uncertain terms of

Nelson Freire's immaculate overall command, allied to a liberation granted to only the finest pianists. A late star in Decca's firmament, Freire now looks back to a time when, as the accompanying interview has it, he was 'a connoisseur's pianist', less well known to a wider public.

Disarmingly, he confesses to nervous tension during the tutti in what was his first performance of Chopin's E minor Concerto, though all possible stress is dissolved in playing of a formidable assurance. Cool and elegant in Chopin, Freire then offers a surprise item, his one and only performance of Schumann's Introduction and Allegro, where all awkward and unpianistic problems are resolved with ease. In Tchaikovsky's First Concerto, Freire is too expert to be routine but here I longed for a more vivid and personal perspective. There are reminders, too, that speed does not always generate excitement.

Few reservations concern Freire's Prokofiev First Concerto. You may miss the savage glint behind Richter's virtuosity (with Karel Ančerl – Supraphon, 11/57) but there is a haunting sense of the slow movement's achingly 'blue' idiom. Again, in Liszt's Second Concerto the nuance and

colouring at, for example, 3'57" are as remarkable as Freire's final sprint to the finishing post. Finally, Rachmaninov's Third Concerto, given with all of Freire's facility and with a blast-off launch to the finale that will surprise those who think of this pianist as more sleek than impassioned. The orchestra under David Zinman hang on by the skin of their teeth.

These are not the sort of performances to prompt vivid metaphors. Yet there are several surprises from a pianist who has often kept emotion at arm's length. Decca's album is lavishly illustrated and, apart from the Tchaikovsky, sound and balance are outstanding. Freire's Chopin, Schumann, Prokofiev and Rachmaninov are new to the catalogue. Bryce Morrison

#### 'Lost and Found'

Fiala Cor anglais Concerto<sup>a</sup> Hoffmeister Oboe Concerto<sup>b</sup> JA Koželuch Oboe Concerto<sup>b</sup> Lebrun Oboe Concerto No 2<sup>b</sup> Albrecht Mayer bob/acor anglais Potsdam Chamber Academy DG © 479 2942GH (73' • DDD)



If Mozart and Haydn have long been established as the dominant Viennese

figures of the 1780s, it is always fascinating to look around and see what else was going on at the same time. Albrecht Mayer has lighted on four concertos - three for oboe, one for cor anglais - by composers whose music in its day would have been conspicuous in the concert landscape. When an artist of Mayer's stature espouses Franz Hoffmeister, Ludwig Lebrun, Joseph Fiala and Jan Antonín Koželuch, you can be confident that there is a compelling musical reason for doing so and that Mayer will show you what it is. And so it proves on this enchanting disc, with the Kammerakademie Potsdam lending poised, pointed support in their combination of clarity, discretion and vitality.

Scrupulously Classical, all four concertos nevertheless harbour traits that give them an individual accent. Hoffmeister's C major Concerto links all three movements together; Lebrun's in G minor has a rondo finale with a catchy tune veering between the minor and major. The Bohemians Fiala and Koželuch are perhaps more predictable harmonically but both knew how to craft elegant, spirited music and how to exploit the solo instrument's capacity for litheness and lyricism. Mayer and his team are thoroughly beguiling advocates throughout. Geoffrey Norris

#### 'Paris'

Kosma Les feuilles mortes Legrand/Marnay/ Barclay La valse des lilas Messiaen Vingt regards sur l'Enfant-Jésus – No 15, Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus Piazzolla Histoire du tango: Café 1930. Oblivion Ravel Vocalise-étude en forme de habanera. Piano Concerto in G – Adagio assai Reinhardt Nuages Satie Gymnopédie No 3. Gnossienne No 3

Alison Balsom tpt The Guy Barker Orchestra / Guy Barker, Timothy Redmond with Miloš Karadaglić, Al Cherry gtrs Grant Windsor pf Warner Classics (£) 2564 63278-9 (52' • DDD)



Studying in Paris helped to define Alison Balsom's belief of what a virtuoso trumpet

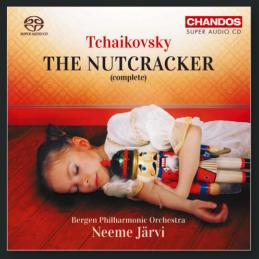
soloist might achieve in the footsteps of her mentor, Maurice André. This potpourri of a recital is, though, very much of its own time, eclectically flavoured in its collaborative elements and juxtaposition of music languages, and deftly underpinned by Balsom's considered curating.

If the opening Satie *Gymnopédie* represents something of a beguiling temptress, a pair of Piazzollas reveal the soloist's inimitable capacity for shaping a melody with the seasoned tonal focus and impeccable intonation which are integral to Balsom's admired armoury.

For all the 'loungey' resonances in the arrangements, there is considerably more skill here than meets the eye. One could never imagine how Michel Legrand's *La valse des lilas* could morph successfully into a reimagined vision of Messaien's 'Le baiser de l'Enfant-Jésus' – but it does with almost Ravelian exoticism. Purists who followed Yvonne Loriod's *Vingt regards* around the world may run a mile, but the result is an ensemble piece of kaleidoscopic discrimination and invention.

Slow-tempo trumpet discs can take their toll in a single sitting, however fine the playing, but there is a pleasing overall shape here; only in the arrangement of the slow movement of the Ravel concerto does the removal of the composer's exquisite original textures occasionally outweigh the gains, not helped by some neutral longueurs in the emotional journey. Atmospherically recorded (as if in a smoky Montmartre club), with a high proportion of excellent arrangements to match Balsom's measured panache, the key to this project's success lies in how she, Guy Barker and Timothy Redmond have restitched a seam of Parisian music culture and envisaged a world which has taken on a life of its own. Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

## CHANDOS New Releases

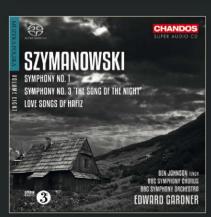


#### Disc of the Month Pyotr Il'yich Tchaikovsky

#### The Nutcracker

Here is the concluding recording in a series devoted to Tchaikovsky's three great ballets performed by Neeme Järvi and the Bergen Philharmonic Orchestra. This complete, uncut version of *The Nutcracker* on one 85-minute CD re-explores Tchaikovsky's masterpiece in order to offer a completely new experience of one of the most-performed ballets in musical history. It follows *The Sleeping Beauty* (CHSA 5113(2)) and *Swan Lake* (CHSA 5124 (2)).

CHSA 5144



#### Szymanowski

#### Symphonies Nos 1 and 3 Love Songs of Hafiz

Edward Gardner returns with the BBC Symphony Orchestra to the intoxicating orchestral music of Karol Szymanowski in their third disc devoted to the composer. Described in BBC Music as 'one of the finest non-Polish interpreters of Szymanowski', Gardner is joined in two works by the rising star Ben Johnson.

CHSA 5143



#### Panufnik

#### Messages

The Brodsky Quartet celebrates Sir Andrzej Panufnik's centenary with Messages. The recording includes the three quartets by Sir Andrzej, Memories of My Father, a Brodsky Quartet commission, by his daughter, Roxanna, and the sextet Modlitwa, a joint father-daughter composition. CHAN 10839

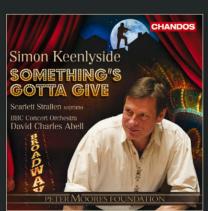


#### Fauré/Lekeu/ Ravel

#### French Violin Sonatas

Tasmin Little explores three great French violin sonatas, after a much revered recording of British violin sonatas in 2013. She and the pianist Martin Roscoe immerse themselves in music of eminent late-nineteenth-century French composers: Gabriel Fauré, Guillaume Lekeu, and Maurice Ravel.

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#### Simon Keenlyside Something's Gotta Give

Simon Keenlyside, one of the world's most charismatic and sought-after operatic baritones, presents an album devoted to well-loved songs from musicals. It features two leading artists of musical theatre, the soprano Scarlett Strallen and conductor David Charles Abell, with the BBC Concert Orchestra.

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#### ANDRZEJ PANUFNIK (1914–1991) CENTENARY REISSUE



'Panufnik's music of depth, poetry and emotion is revealed in this heartfelt reading by Robert Thompson of the elegiac power of the Bassoon concerto.' Andrew Clark, The Financial Times

'The Bassoon concerto is a memorial for the tortured and murdered Polish priest Father Jerzy Popiełuszko and is notable for its dramatic impulse and Thompson's beautiful lyric tone.' Paul Driver, The Sunday Times

'The profound intensity of the music-making shines through with great potency. That is particularly evident in the Bassoon Concerto.' Gramophone

'There is something compelling about Robert Thompson's tone and musicianship that makes his performance unforgettable.' Andrew McGregor, BBC Radio 3 CD Review

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#### **GRAMOPHONE** Focus

#### THIELEMANN'S BRAHMS

**Peter Quantrill** takes stock as Thielemann's Brahms recordings – recently issued and brand new – are boxed up for screen and stereo



Voicing every part: Christian Thielemann's Dresden Staatskapelle Brahms on CD and DVD

rahms has arrived / It wouldn't be quite so bad / if his cigar smell / didn't stink out the music room for days on end.'

Thus spake Alfred Brendel in 'Brahms II'. Whereas for Christian Thielemann, Brahms smells of lake water. In a discreetly edited, 50-minute piece to camera he begins by saying 'I have never had to make an effort to understand Brahms,' which would sound arrogant were it not that the performances here, for good or ill, largely bear out an easy communication both to us and the Staatskapelle Dresden recognisable from but more penetrating than the style of his Beethoven recorded in Vienna (4/12).

There as here, we have the choice of filmed concerts or their audio-only counterparts, though the films of the First and Third were made in Tokyo. In a note for the Dresden concert programme, Axel Brüggemann sought to link Thielemann with Kurt Sanderling, who led the last Brahms cycle to be recorded by the orchestra in 1971-72, through their joint goal 'to make audible the timeless emotions of a composition'. This allows him to take a pop at the paper tiger of 'dogmatic historical performance practice'; but at moments such as the six-second pause before the big tune of the First's finale, Thielemann is in hock to other traditions, not including Sanderling, who makes do with a plain up-beat. And the

melody itself? 'I don't remember what's in the score, if it says *forte* [it says *poco forte*], but I always have it played as if from afar. I think it's nice ['schön'] when it appears slowly on the horizon.' There is Thielemann's Brahms in a nutshell. Not for him the score's contrast between the *Allegro non troppo* and *animato* sections but a seamless progress between the two while making a personal drama from dynamic subtleties and *legato* or separated articulation.

This rounded approach pays dividends in the Second, 'like a joyful summer day with not much depth in it, actually. I don't find the Second so easy to conduct because it should not be too harmless, otherwise nothing happens. The slow movement clouds over, but...conductors must beware that they don't make a Requiem out of it.' He is as good as his word. The finale is an object demonstration both of the 'archaic violence' he believes is proper to Brahms, and of his determination to voice every part, let nothing become passagework or accompaniment. For the same reasons, the Tragic Overture is the highlight of the CD set, driven forwards with unrelenting energy and an unremitting vision of its goal.

Thielemann is clearly obsessed by the Third. 'In conducting circles it is considered the most difficult and not without justification the least comprehensible... You really don't get anywhere with the means you employ in the other symphonies. If you use the same tempo all the way through [the first movement], you're on the wrong track.' This sounds fair until you turn to Sanderling, who finds a tempo giusto and sticks to it. The rage that Colin Davis heard in the finale is translated by Thielemann in sound and word as a steam train ploughing through the taiga, flattening anything in its path. 'One rarely succeeds in pulling it off,' Thielemann remarks, 'not to make people feel the tension ebbing away. This is why I now always place the Third at the end of a concert.' I like the idea; but the Dresden concert represented on CD had the Third before the interval.

Thielemann's steam train has a problem with its brakes. The Third's Poco allegretto is freighted with regret and grinds to a standstill at the reprise, but the coda of the Fourth's first movement comes off the rails. As ever he looks for light in the texture, and behind the notes. In Dresden he has the ideal orchestra to help him find it. The horns retain their muted glow from Sanderling's day, the flutes always present however dense the orchestration. The slow movement is 'almost cheerful', the jangling Scherzo 'like a visit to the Oktoberfest. The beer is flowing, you've eaten pork knuckle. It's one of my favourite movements.' Introducing his own filmed recording (on Hänssler), Sir Roger Norrington talked in similar terms of 'a sailor's song from his Hamburg days', and what they say is what you get.

Is it what you want? Aside from the Second and the overtures, I miss the drama of the here and now. Too many cadence points place the symphonic argument in a golden frame. In the concerto films included as a bonus to the CD set, neither soloist seems content to rest within that frame, and Batiashvili plays Busoni's cadenza to the Violin Concerto like a Wyndham Lewis in a room full of John Singer Sargent. Schoenberg gave us Brahms the modernist. Do we now have Brahms the postmodernist? Unlikely thought. **6** 

#### THE RECORDINGS



Brahms Syms. Pf Concs. Vn Conc Pollini, Batiashvill; Staatskapelle Dresden / Thielemann DG (3) 4 (3) + 222) 479 2787GH4



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### Sir Edward Elgar's Sea Pictures

Sarah Connolly speaks to James Jolly about one of the best loved of all British song-cycles

wo identical Boosey & Hawkes scores of Elgar's Sea Pictures and two identical cups of tea sit on the dining room table overlooking one of the most breathtaking views of the south Cotswolds. It's a perfect setting for an afternoon chat about this loveliest of song-cycles with one of today's most lauded interpreters of the work, Sarah Connolly. She's just released her second recording of the cycle, a spectacularly generous 'filler' for the new Chandos recording of The Dream of Gerontius.

Sea Pictures sets five poems: 'Sea Slumber-Song', 'In Haven (Capri)', 'Sabbath Morning at Sea', 'Where Corals Lie' and 'The Swimmer' – all by different poets, making it something

## 'There's a lack of reserve, a wonderful openness and self-expression that is not typically English' – Sarah Connolly

of a novelty for the time (earlier orchestral song-cycles, such as Berlioz's *Les nuits d'été* or Wagner's *Wesendonck-Lieder*, set poems by the same poet). It was premiered in Norwich in October 1899. Elgar conducted, and the singer was the young contralto Clara Butt, who chose that evening to dress like a mermaid, complete with fishtail!

Looking at the score, there are a few dips down into the lower registers, which are meat and drink to a contralto, but I wondered whether they might cause a problem for a mezzo-soprano. 'I think the first song is definitely the most challenging with regard to low tessitura: there's a bottom G on "sand",' Connolly acknowledges. 'But the thing is to try and create the mood, this mystical quality of the sea, with super-legato and not push the voice to make it sound grander than it is. If you do, then you lose the mystical quality. You obviously have to have the notes and a certain breadth of sound, but I don't think an enormous contralto voice is necessary – and besides, I doubt it would fit "Where Corals Lie", unless the singer can slim it down. Certainly different songs requires different colours, and the first song requires a real open-throated relaxation of the lower part of the voice.'

One of the most striking things, as you leaf through the first few pages of the score, is the abundance of volume markings – nearly every phrase has a hairpin, and there are countless



Riding the crest of a wave in Elgar's Sea Pictures: mezzo-soprano Sarah Connolly

instructions for *p*, *pp*, *ppp* and even *pppp*. 'And there are so many different varieties of *pianissimo*,' adds Connolly. 'Actually, I've found it's quite difficult to get orchestras to obey these *pianos* – and it's not just *piano*, but a certain quality of *piano*, a slightly airy quality as required at the words "Sea-sound, like violins". They're playing a slightly dusky sound, and as I'm singing the same notes I try to put air into my voice to really make it blend.'

The second song of the cycle sets words by Elgar's wife, Alice, and was actually written a couple of years before the remainder of the cycle. 'I like Alice's poem very much. I think it's in a way the most honest of them all because it's a beautiful expression of two people in love and getting old.' I suggest that also it contains one of the loveliest melodies... 'Absolutely! And it's just a perfect little song. It's just three verses, with a strophic simplicity, and it's almost Schubert-like in its directness. And the *pizzicatos* in the cellos are almost



#### The historical view

Sir Edward Elgar Letter to AJ Jaeger, October 1899

'The cycle went marvellously well & "we" were recalled four times - I think - after that I got disgusted & lost count. She [Clara Butt] sang really well.'

The Times Review of the Norwich Festival premiere of Sea Pictures, October 6, 1899

'Both singer and composer were recalled over and over again...the songs have undoubtedly been launched on a prosperous career.'

#### Gramophone Herman Klein recalling the Norwich premiere, October 1927

'It made an impression which I for one shall not readily forget. The individuality of the musician is stamped upon every bar; the whole thing is *spirituel*, detached in feeling, poetic and original in conception.'

like youthful steps – like a memory of them walking on the beaches or climbing up the dunes. All these things are pictures of their lives together.'

Connolly points out that the cycle is built with powerful songs first, third and fifth, with two lighter songs (Nos 2 and 4) fitting perfectly in between. 'They certainly add a textural and emotional balance, too. What's really clever is that each of the five songs is about something completely different from the others, but it's all a response to being by the sea, the effect of the sea on us, how it meshes with our imaginations, our psyche, our consciousness. And being on an island, we're never far from the sea, so we identify as islanders with the sea and its mood and colours. And our history's filled with Nelson and sea battles, so it's all very much part of the British psyche.'

Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'Sabbath Morning at Sea' forms the heart of the cycle – it's a song with a unique intensity that Connolly sees as a tribute to Wagner: 'It reminds me of the Pilgrims' Chorus from *Tannhäuser*. It's surely – and I'm sure others would agree – a reference to Wagner's big melody. It's exactly the same orchestration, the same spacing of trombones, and it's so clear that there is a loving reference to *Tannhäuser* with that stately quality, that religious intoning. I think it's Elgar's most successful song. He was a Europhile, and I think he was really tapping into his admiration for Wagner. It's a song that requires a tremendous spiritual energy. I don't mean religious, I mean with conviction.'

If forced to pick one of the *Sea Pictures* as an encore, Connolly would opt for 'Where Corals Lie', a setting of Richard Garnett. 'Everyone loves it in England! Again, it's got this *pizzicato* bass, this elfin quality. And there's this huge Irish link in these songs; I always feel that. And particularly in this one.' Irishness? 'Well, there's a lack of reserve, a wonderful openness and self-expression that is not typically English and with this one there's a certain folk feel to it. I always feel I'm identifying with my Irish side – I'm half Irish – when I sing this song.'

The final song, one of the longer ones, takes words from a poem by Adam Lindsay Gordon in which the *sound* of the words rather than their actual *meaning* seems to have more impact. 'Well, it's all that alliteration,' explains Connolly. 'Just like Britten's choice of Ronald Duncan for *The Rape of Lucretia*, it's not the greatest stand-alone poetry but it's got extraordinary dramatic quality and I think many composers tap into that. A lot seem to choose texts that are expressive in an almost naive way.'

'The storm sprite loosens the gusty reins / Now the stoutest ship were the frailest shallop / In your hollow backs, on your high-arched manes', goes Gordon's verse. 'It's actually quite difficult to get the text out at that point,' Connolly confesses. 'Luckily there's nothing doubling me at that point and I've the highest line there, but it's really quite rocky in the accompaniment and there's nowhere to breathe. It's very hard work on the body. I feel the best performances I give are when I allow myself to let go (provided I'm in good voice!) and just lead, almost like a surfer does – slightly ahead of the wave.'

Connolly sees it as her duty to take British song abroad whenever she can: she's performed *Sea Pictures* in the Czech Republic ('They found the piece very sad!'), and next April the audience at New York's Avery Fisher Hall will be treated to the cycle in Elgar's piano-accompanied version. Although Connolly won't be dressed as a mermaid, she's having some thoughts about something suitably blue-green and twinkly, albeit without the fishtail – time to put a call out to Zandra Rhodes, she's thinking!

► To read Gramophone's review of Sarah Connolly's Sea Pictures, turn to page 71



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## Chamber



#### Guy Rickards listens to another batch of Röntgen piano trios:

Four delightful chamber works, warmly lyrical, quirky in expression with little repetitiveness' > REVIEW ON PAGE 49



#### Geoffrey Norris on Saint-Saëns from the Aquinas Piano Trio:

In the trio's lucid textures pianist Martin Cousin finds the limpid tone fluently and with finesse' > REVIEW ON PAGE 49

#### **Beethoven**

Complete Works for Cello and Piano **Jean-Guihen Queyras** *vc* **Alexander Melnikov** *pf*Harmonia Mundi (M) (2) HMC90 2183/4 (139' • DDD)



Jean-Guihen Queyras isn't the first cellist to record the Beethoven cello works with

sparing use of vibrato but few of them, historically informed or not, have selected their use of vibrato with such a discriminating ear for structural function and expressive necessity. Yet one never hears the mechanics of these decisions. Certainly there are various earmarks of the performance practices to which Queyras subscribes to one extent or another; but how they apply to the music seems to come from instinct more than exterior observation. His cello always speaks with its own conversational voice, not as the music's curator but as its protagonist.

What that actually translates into: individual notes aren't fussed over, and everything is part of a larger phrase and idea, the peak of which is often accentuated with vibrato but never predictably so. Any long-sustained note would seem to be a likely magnet for vibrato, though Queyras's choices are often not obvious but reveal the phrase with a sureness that's congruent with the music's long-term narrative. In the more humble variations, the piano is often the dominant instrument; and, unlike Mischa Maisky in his recordings with Martha Argerich (DG, 2/95), Queyras doesn't fight that but often adopts a light tenor-timbre tone that recedes from the foreground but always reminds you why it's there.

Pianist Alexander Melnikov rewards that primary focus given to him in the variations and the early Op 5 Sonatas with great precision of effect – colour, nuance and expression – that's not often encountered even among the best chamber music players. Just as Melnikov was as responsible as Isabelle Faust for the considerable

success of their Beethoven violin sonata set (it's my single favourite -10/10), he finds hidden meaning in the music when the bluster of competitive tension is removed. The two players listen closely to each other, even at such a low volume that they seem to be exhaling in synchronicity. Their reading of the popular Op 69 Sonata is the polar opposite of the youthfully explosive Yo-Yo Ma/Emanuel Ax recording (Sony, 6/84), with Queyras and Melnikov making sure no blocks of gratuitous sound obscure the individual character of any given passage but never downplaying Beethoven's hairpin turns. More oblique passages of the Op 102 Sonatas may not be markedly clearer in their meaning but at least you know more clearly what Beethoven put on the page. David Patrick Stearns

#### Berlioz · Liszt

**Berlioz** Harold en Italie, Op 16 (arr Liszt, S472) **Liszt** Nuages gris, S199. Oh! quand je dors, S282. Romance oubliée, S132. Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort. S203

**Jennifer Stumm** *v*∂ **Elizabeth Pridgen** *pf* Orchid **(E)** ORC100044 (58' • DDD)



Though *Harold in Italy* is very much the main work, this issue is as much about Liszt as

Berlioz. This is because the arrangements of a song and two late piano pieces, plus the Romance oubliée, are interleaved with the movements of the symphony, and because Liszt's arrangement of Berlioz's orchestral score is a creative achievement in its own right. The Liszt transcriptions are all extremely effective, especially the high viola in unison with piano octaves in the first part of Schlaflos! Frage und Antwort, which conveys most vividly the impression of desperate insomniac anxiety. They also complement the symphonic movements next to which they are placed: the melancholy of Nuages gris provides an apt introduction to the first movement, and the romantic Oh! quand je dors

makes a delightful pendant to the symphony's Serenade.

In transferring *Harold* to the piano quite a lot is inevitably lost – the misty landscape at the start, the smooth, vocal phrasing of the Pilgrims' evening prayer, and the folksy sonorities at the start of the Serenade. But much is entirely convincing on viola and piano; the first movement, where the viola has the most active role, particularly so. Other beautiful passages are the viola's arpeggios in the Pilgrims' March and the reminiscences at the start of the finale. Jennifer Stumm's playing is remarkably refined, yet with a wide expressive range, and Elizabeth Pridgen really comes into her own with the Brigands' Orgy, a severe test of virtuoso ability at which she succeeds triumphantly. Duncan Druce

#### Beuger

tschirtner tunings for twelve **Konzert Minimal** Another Timbre (F) AT77 (79' • DDD)



And after the silence, what next? Dutch composer and flautist Antoine Beuger has

spent much of his time over the past 30 years ruminating about the implications of that question. In 1992 Beuger was one of the founding members of the Wandelweiser Group, which would soon evolve into a collective of composers, improvisers and performers (including Michael Pisaro, Radu Malfatti and Jürg Frey) all motivated to go deeper into the philosophical and practical questions raised by the existence of John Cage's conceptual masterwork 4'33". Wandelweiser to the rest of the world: Cage's great learning is too important to ignore.

Beuger devised *tschirtner tunings for twelve* in 2005 and the score is realised by the ensemble Konzert Minimal on this new recording from the Sheffield-based label Another Timbre. It sprawls over a full 79 minutes, this piece which reduces the

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Amandine Beyer and Gli Incogniti, now on Harmonia Mundi, record Couperin's Apothéoses at the Théâtre des Quatre Saisons de Gradigan

need for material to a minimum and has a score which could have been sketched out on the back of a fag packet: the thinking about what to do overriding the importance of how to do it. As I write, I'm listening. Normally if I try to write and listen, I write badly and don't hear a thing. But Beuger's music can be appreciated at the level of high-class background sound clouds drifting through the atmosphere.

Listen closer, though, and a network of mesmerising internal detail is revealed. Konzert Minimal is a mixed ensemble consisting of musicians who variously play notated modern composition and improvise, and actively seek out scores that require them to float somewhere between the two. And the set-up is as follows: Beuger defines notes and how this ensemble of woodwind and brass with accordion and vibraphone ought to execute them; but where the musicians choose to place those sounds is, within given time brackets, up to them. The resulting melange of sustained lines waltzing and gliding past each other, the material fixed but the structure a matter of controlled chance, reveals an unexpectedly pungent palette of sound; the less material, the more our ears can focus on the enormousness of tiny variations. Philip Clark

#### **Britten**

Simple Symphony, Op 4. Rhapsody. Quartettino. Phantasy in F minor<sup>a</sup>. String Quartet in F Emperor Quartet with <sup>a</sup>John Metcalfe va
BIS ® BIS1870 (75' • DDD)



This release follows on from two earlier Britten discs by the Emperor Quartet

on BIS (A/10, 12/13), which together comprise the composer's complete works for string quartet. With the three mature quartets having already appeared, the final volume turns to youthful works, all composed between 1928 and 1934, though it is no less interesting for that. An obvious attraction is the popular Simple Symphony, making a rare appearance performed by solo strings (though the Britten and Maggini Quartets have recorded it in the past). With the Emperor Quartet's quick reactions, the piece takes on a new guise in this intimate form, at once spikily alive in the outer movements and confiding of private secrets at the heart of the 'Sentimental Saraband'.

Each of the other items is worth investigating. The heartfelt *Rhapsody*,

written by the 15-year-old Britten in his school sanatorium, is remarkably skilful in its Ravel-tinted language, much more than a youthful curiosity. The Quartettino comprises three succinct genre pieces, very much in the early Britten idiom. The *Phantasy* in F minor for string quintet, not related to the one with oboe, is fluent beyond the composer's years, embracing varied moods and colours (John Metcalfe as second viola). Although the String Quartet in F is more jejune, its youthful exuberance keeps it bubbling along. All these other works have been recorded by the Endellion Quartet, originally for EMI, also included on disc 58 of Decca's 'Britten: The Complete Works'. Sometimes the Emperor Quartet's warmth of expression seems preferable, sometimes the Endellion's liveliness. Either way, these youthful pieces repay one's attention.

#### **Richard Fairman**

Smaller wks – selected comparison: Endellion Qt (7/87<sup>R</sup>, 7/95<sup>R</sup>) (EMI) 015149-2

#### F Couperin

'Apothéoses'

La Superbe. Apothéose de Lully. Le Parnasse, ou L'apothéose de Corelli. La Sultane **Gii Incogniti / Amandine Beyer** *Vn* Harmonia Mundi ® HMC90 2193 (58' • DDD)



Couperin waited until his last decade to publish his Italianinspired chamber

music. The two largest works – apotheoses to Corelli and Lully – appeared in 1724 and 1725, and were probably composed for the *concerts royaux* at Versailles in Louis XIV's final years. The descriptive titles of the movements tell the stories of their imagined elevation to Parnassus and also provide invaluable clues to their performance practice. Although Couperin did not specify the instrumentation, a preference for violins (and flutes) in certain movements is clear, as for example in the 1725 work when the two composer violinists accompany one another in turn.

Couperin also left several works in manuscript, among them two 'sonades', one *en trio* and other *en quatuor*, said to date from the 1690s, when Marais, La Guerre, Rebel and Montéclair were also experimenting with Corellian *sonate da chiesa* and *da camera*, and were very likely performed at the court of James II at Saint-Germain-en-Laye and in Parisian salons. *La Superbe* is scored for two *dessus*, viol and harpsichord, *La Sultane* with an added, independent bass viol part.

Having released an acclaimed recording of Corelli's Op 6 last year (2/14), the violinist Amandine Beyer and Gli Incogniti have turned to Couperin for their first recording with Harmonia Mundi. These are lively, elegant, performances that capture the subtlety of Couperin without affectation or special effects. The opening movement of La Sultane - possibly his earliest essay in the Italian style – is among the most beautiful and the most French: the independent viol (surely Marin Marais) and continuo players initiate this and each of the other movements, setting the tempo and tone - something Corelli would never have done; thereafter the viol, played here by Baldomero Barciela, is heard in imitation and antiphonally with the trebles, creating rich textures heard only once before, in Charpentier's Sonate a 8 from the mid-1680s.

Though hardly the only recording of these works, Gli Incogniti's should be considered among the best. Let's hope they decide to revive some of the lesser-known music of Couperin's French contemporaries.

Julie Anne Sadie

#### **Dieupart**

'Les suittes'

L Couperin Prélude Dieupart Suites - I; II; III; VI Corina Marti recs Tore Eketorp quinton Soma Salat-Zakariás va da gamba Yizhar Karshon hpd Ziv Braha theo Carpe Diem ® CD16303 (58' • DDD)



Dieupart's 1701 Six suittes de clavessin (French in style and origin, dedicated to

an English duchess and published in Amsterdam) were immensely popular in their day and still attract advocates, of whom Yizhar Karshon and Corina Marti are the latest. Dieupart was the first French composer to use the term 'suites' and to publish his music simultaneously in two different versions: one for solo harpsichord, the other 'mise en concerts' for violin and flute with a bass viol and archlute; one can acquire recordings of either.

This recording, of four of the six suites, offers both. Listening to it is as if present at a rehearsal in which the performers experiment with the instrumentation. The most fascinating element of their performance is the enchanting sound of the French quinton (a five-string fretted instrument with sloping shoulders), favoured in France in the 1690s and played here by Tore Eketorp, rather than a violin. The quinton blends particularly well with the timbres of the treble and alto recorders as well as the bass viol (trs 4, 6, 23, 25 and 26). Karshon performs No 6 in its solo version, along with an unmeasured prelude by Louis Couperin, and joins in Nos 1-3.

The degree of experimentation within movements and suites is the only issue in question. In some respects, Marti and Karshon seem to have stepped outside the generally acknowledged boundaries of late-17th- and early-18th-century French performance practice. What is the evidence for their decision to add instruments in the course of movements (usually in the repeats) such as the Allemande and Sarabande of No 1, the Sarabande and Gavotte of No 2, and the Sarabande and Menuet of No 3? Certainly, a precedent for changing instrumentation from movement to movement may be found in, for example, Montéclair's Sérénade (1697), and it may well be that Dieupart would have sanctioned their decision to change the instrumentation from movement to movement (as they do in Nos 1 and 3), but I would have enjoyed the disc more had it been less contrived.

Julie Anne Sadie

#### Dvořák · Schubert

'Menahem Pressler: The 90th Birthday Celebration - Live in Paris' **Dvořák** Piano Quintet, Op 81 B155 **Schubert** Piano Quintet, 'Trout', D667<sup>a</sup> **Menahem Pressler** of

Ebène Quartet with Benjamin Berlioz db
Erato (a) (CD + 222) 2564 62596-4 (76' • DDD)
Recorded live at the Salle Pleyel, Paris,
November 7, 2013



A captivating sense of teamwork permeates every second of this engaging document,

vividly captured by the Erato recording engineers at a special concert in Paris's Salle Pleyel last November, a few weeks prior to the 90th birthday of the indefatigable Menahem Pressler.

The Dvořák comes first, and what an inspired match the phenomenally articulate Quatuor Ebène prove to be for the veteran Pressler's subtly accommodating pianism. In the opening Allegro, ma non tanto the range of characterisation, unbridled spontaneity and tumbling fantasy are entrancing; indeed, the coda positively explodes with joy, so much so that the packed auditorium can't contain its enthusiasm. ('Get over it!' exhorts my better half when she sees me wince a little - and she's right.) Barely have the cheers subsided than Pressler launches the sublime 'Dumka' slow movement, which enjoys intensely concentrated, memorably pliable advocacy. The Scherzo fairly skips along, its contrastingly long-breathed Trio negotiated with graceful poise. How ineffably touching, too, is that oasis of calm before the work's exuberant final flourish (try from 6'36" through to the end).

The Schubert *Trout* (featuring the admirable Benjamin Berlioz on double bass) operates at a slightly lower level of tension but radiates such communicative spirit and pure delight in making music together that one readily forgives the very occasional rough edge or slip of the finger. Above all, of course, this cherishable pairing is a celebration of how one remarkable survivor has immeasurably enriched the lives of so many.

Andrew Achenbach

#### Franck · Grieg · Dvořák

Dvořák Four Romantic Pieces, Op 75 B150 Franck Violin Sonata Grieg Violin Sonata No 3, Op 45 Renaud Capuçon vn Khatia Buniatishvili pf Erato (£) 2564 62501-8 (66' • DDD)





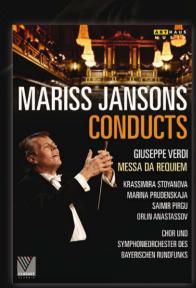
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Any violinist not relying on *portamento* to intensify the lyricism of their

performance of high-Romantic chamber music is a brave one. Despite the fact that Renaud Capuçon plays with a full-blooded tone, it is rare to hear him overblow, either in Bach or – as here – in more robust repertoire. Rather, there is a calmness to his sense of melody that has a tendency to give his performances identity enough without interfering with the relationship between the listener and the composer's aspirations for them.

This works well in the uncomplicated tenderness of Dvořák's Four Romantic Pieces and also in the threatened halcvon character of Grieg's Third Violin Sonata (although there it occasionally lacks a certain airiness that in some performances, such as Henning Kraggerud's on Naxos, is a more effective driving force behind the imagery). However, it is the Franck Sonata that is the high point of this disc, and that is down not only to Capuçon but also to his collaboration with his accompanist, Khatia Buniatishvili. With Capuçon's selfpossessed serenity on what is fundamentally the leading line and Batiatishvili's fiery assertiveness in the accompaniment, they create a whole that is greater even than the sum of its remarkable parts. The piece itself sits together as a cohesive unity, with its musical ideas relaying from one to the other with complete sense and purpose; and that they have done so with little obvious attempt at imposition of will is testament not only to their maturity as individual artists and as a partnership but to the strength of the music they have chosen. Caroline Gill

Grieg – selected comparison: Kraggerud, Kjekshus (NAXO) 8 553904

#### Franck · R Strauss

Franck Violin Sonata
R Strauss Violin Sonata, Op 18
Arabella Steinbacher vn Robert Kulek pf
Pentatone (E) PTC5186 470 (58' • DDD/DSD)



Played at its best, the Franck Violin Sonata presents itself as an almost through-

composed piece, the wildly varying musical ideas held together by an unseen hook that allows a perfectly smooth passage through the piece from beginning to end. If it is

overplayed, though, that invisible line is broken and the phrases become a series of unrelated truncations, joined together by intense acceleration and, often, extreme compensatory braking. Despite the sonata's hardy nature, it is nevertheless this sense that permeates Arabella Steinbacher's performance – particularly in the first movement, which feels very much as if everything has been fully disclosed before the end of the exposition - although it is not that of Robert Kulek, whose accompaniment is neither more nor less intense than it needs to be. As a result, his statesmanlike role in the performance feels more like gentle mitigation than the musical incitement of a response.

They are much more evenly matched, happily, in Strauss's more straightforwardly Romantic Sonata in E flat, which although not the same masterpiece as the Franck – showcases Steinbacher's profound lyrical talent to much purer effect. Even though this sonata shares more with Strauss's chamber music than his largerscale work, the unadulterated rhapsodic nature of the piece (set against a backdrop of extreme technicality) results in a performance that sits far more comfortably not only with Steinbacher herself but with her sophisticated musical relationship with Kulek. This gives it a greater sense of elasticity, integrity and natural evolution than the Franck, which makes it easier to engage with and invest in. Caroline Gill

#### Kuhlau

Violin Sonata, Op 64. Three Violin Sonatas, Op 79 **Duo Åstrand/Salo** Dacapo ® 8 226082 (70' • DDD)



The German-born Friedrich Kuhlau settled in Copenhagen in his early twenties

and enjoyed a modest amount of success there. He has been posthumously adopted by Danes as a figurehead composer of their so-called Golden Age in the first half of the 19th century (represented more famously in literature and philosophy by the likes of Hans Christian Andersen and Kierkegaard).

Great admirer of Beethoven though he may have been, Kuhlau's sonatas for violin and piano sound more like a transitional phase between Mozart and Weber (with strong echoes of the latter's *Grand Duo concertant* in the finale of Op 64, originally for flute and piano). There are occasional reminders, too, of Schubert's so-miscalled Sonatinas. The opening of the first of the

shorter Op 79 sonatas sounds like a missing link between Mozart's E flat Piano Quartet and Schumann's Piano Quintet. No small compliment, this, and there is a good deal of charm and verve to be found in all Kuhlau's pieces, along with a good deal of jolly pianistic athleticism. Yet with little or nothing of the kind of adventure and risk-taking of the major figures above mentioned, the music remains more suited to domestic listening and pedagogical use than to the concert-hall experience.

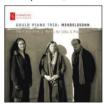
The playing on the new Dacapo disc is admirably clean, flexible and responsive, both to the music and between the two players. The piano tone itself is quite metallic but not all that hard to adjust to. Jens Cornelius supplies an informative essay. Admittedly Kuhlau rarely puts a foot wrong, but that's mainly because he likes the security of the middle of the road.

#### **David Fanning**

#### Mendelssohn

Piano Trios - No 1, Op 49; No 2, Op 66. Albumblatt, Op 117. Song Without Words, Op 109. Variations concertantes, Op 17 **Gould Piano Trio** 

Champs Hill (F) CHRCD088 (73' • DDD)



For a long time Mendelssohn's First Piano Trio has been much more popular

than its successor but today it seems easier to appreciate the two as equal but different; the memorable melodies of the one complemented by the darker, more intense mood of the other.

This new recording trades the beautiful clarity of the fine 2003 account by the Florestan Trio for a richer, more resonant sound; if the Florestan present Mendelssohn as a Classicist, Lucy Gould and her colleagues stress his Romantic side, his ability to contrast different shades of emotion and create powerful, evocative musical landscapes. For instance, I love the way the Gould Trio refuse to accept the First Trio's *Andante* as a sweet, pretty song without words but search out all the expressive details of harmony and melody, giving the piece its own unique character.

Throughout the performances, Benjamin Frith revels in the brilliance of Mendelssohn's pianism, yet without overshadowing the strings who, in their turn, enjoy finding tones of gentleness, solemnity or agitation as the music suggests. The two *Scherzos* are models of confident, precise ensemble playing, while the extraordinary finale of the Second Trio brings forth playing that moves with absolute conviction from the intensity of its earlier part to its triumphant conclusion, inspired by a Lutheran chorale melody.

The other items, comprising Mendelssohn's shorter works for cello and piano, are just as convincing, the *Variations concertantes* combining brilliance with expressive warmth, while in the *Song Without Words*, Alice Neary's tone and phrasing combine to give her line a truly vocal quality. **Duncan Druce** 

Pf Trios – selected comparison: Florestan Trio (2/06) (HYPE) CDA67485

#### Puccini · R Strauss · Verdi

Puccini Crisantemi. Three Minuets R Strauss String Quartet, Op 2 Verdi String Quartet Enső Ouartet

Naxos ® 8 573108 (66' • DDD)



You will not need reminding by now that the Strauss and Verdi quartets, a

familiar record-company coupling, are the only works for the medium by two composers of predominantly vocal music. Written within seven years of each other, they differ in that the Strauss is a prentice piece in no way anticipating masterworks to come, the Verdi audibly the work of the mature master heard midway between *Aida* and *Otello*.

There is another link, however, in the evident admiration of both composers for the 'Classical' Viennese masters of the genre. The Strauss has some clearly deliberate homage to the Beethoven Op 18 Quartets, the Verdi to Beethoven's final work for the medium but also, perhaps characteristically, to the anarchic earthy side of Haydn – the dynamic surprises in the *Andantino* or the whole idea of a fugal finale.

The performances of the two main works by this New York-based quartet are serious and straightforward - obviously suited to the Strauss (and with a stirring account of its standout Andante cantabile movement) but perhaps too Germanic for the Verdi. No attempt is made to relax into an 'Italian' atmosphere, even for moments such as the cello melody in the Scherzo. Compare this to the old Alberni recording (CRD, 5/89 nla) where a lusher (and larger) sound and atmosphere pays dividends. Also, if the melodic content and musical argument of Verdi's hugely professional one-off outing intrigue you, try another 'serious' reading from the Amadeus (DG, 9/80), very 'live', with a standard of playing that puts that of

some others in the shade and more relevantly coupled with contemporary Tchaikovsky and Smetana. The shorter Puccini items, little tone-poems, are more lollipop-time and rightly treated as such by the Ensō. A convenient new collection then, but I would want to look elsewhere for the Verdi. Mike Ashman

#### Röntgen

'String Trios, Vol 2'
String Trios - No 5; No 6; No 7; No 8
Lendvai String Trio
Champs Hill ® CHRCDO87 (69' • DDD)



The Lendvai Trio's previous disc of Röntgen string trios (2/14),

featuring Nos 1-4, was one of the great surprises of the year to date: four delightful chamber works, warmly lyrical, quirky in expression with little of the longueurs or repetitiveness to which this composer sometimes fell victim, all superbly played by the Lendvai Trio and caught in excellent sound by Champs Hill. Could the next batch maintain the same level of quality all round?

Well, the answer is a resounding 'yes'. Röntgen may have churned trios out in unusually large numbers, often in rapid succession - Nos 5-7 here were written a few months apart in 1920, with No 8 following in 1923 - but he clearly had a real talent for these intimate dialogues, not intended as public statements. The writing is lean, with a rather Classical (or neoclassical) feel. The slow movements display a winning lyricism – not quite equalling that of the First, perhaps - and in Nos 6 and 7 sport a rather folk-like tint (as with Nos 3 and 4). Harmonically, the music sounds of its time but what compels attention throughout is the sense of fun, particularly in the scherzos. Nos 6 and 7 are four-movement designs with discrete scherzo, whereas the Fifth's scherzo finale plays tag with the listener's expectations of what theme it should end with before sidestepping the question completely. The tripartite Eighth is almost built out of three scherzos, their gentle humour making for a most satisfying whole.

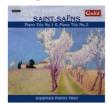
The Lendvai Trio once more acquit themselves with flying colours, their infectious enthusiasm consistently communicated. As I said of Vol 1, 'With beautifully clear, natural sound, listening to this disc is a delightful way to spend an hour': so is Vol 2.

**Guy Rickards** 

#### Saint-Saëns

Piano Trios - No 1, Op 18; No 2, Op 92 **Aquinas Piano Trio** 

Guild (F) GMCD7408 (61' • DDD)



Geniality and impeccable craftsmanship go hand in hand when it comes

to Saint-Saëns's piano trios. As Basil Smallman remarked in his study of the piano trio genre (1990), the First Trio of 1869 is 'notable for its classical elegance of style, [deploying] many charming, though never profound, musical ideas'. This is music to enjoy, as the Aquinas Piano Trio clearly do in playing it. Although by no means without its moments of emphatic drama, the trio's demeanour is predominantly one of delicacy and restraint, gently projecting its ideas through lucid textures in which the pianist Martin Cousin fluently and with finesse finds the trio's limpid tone, with the violin and cello of Ruth Rogers and Katherine Jenkinson eloquently establishing their place within the colour scheme. The recording sensibly stresses the intimate nature of the music. At times there could usefully be a touch more focus on the string lines but that does not unduly detract from a performance that is precisely attuned to the music's affable allure.

The Second Trio of 1892 is larger in both scale and expressive gesture. The E minor key seems to provoke more searching thoughts and Saint-Saëns spreads his ideas over five movements rather than four. Contrast and cohesion nevertheless coalesce in the working-out of material, and again the Aquinas Trio are spot-on in interpretative instinct.

**Geoffrey Norris** 

#### 'Barroco español'

Anonymous Xácara Boccherini Minuet. La musica notturna delle strade di Madrid Brunetti Sonata in D Murcia Canarios. Grabe Nebra Seguidilla Sanz Passacalles D Scarlatti Sonata, Kk208 A Soler Sonatas - G major; G minor. Fandango

Nils Mönkemeyer va Klaus-Dieter Brandt vc Thomas Zscherpe db Sabine Erdmann hpd Andreas Arend gtr/theo Anja Herrmann perc Sony Classical © 88843 04224-2 (73' • DDD)



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viola is played by someone of the calibre of Nils Mönkemeyer, who has garnered praise worldwide for his magnificent richness of tone and virtuosity, and has in any case made a career from adapting other music for his instrument. He speaks with cheerful enthusiasm in the booklet-notes of the development of his enthusiasm for Spanish music of this period when he began to teach in Madrid.

Some of the choices of repertoire to adapt for solo viola and small continuo group are perfectly logical, such as the Sonata in D minor by Gaetano Brunetti or the Musica notturna by Boccherini, and some are rather more surprising, such as the arrangements of keyboard sonatas by Soler or Nebra's marvellous Seguidilla, but they are all are extremely convincing and there is a remarkable consistency about the whole collection in spite of the variety of its contents. Scarlatti also appears, like Soler, in an arrangement of a keyboard sonata for viola and continuo, specifically the lovely Sonata in A, Kk208, whose yearning melodic writing gives Mönkemeyer every opportunity to display his glowing tone.

The Boccherini is also a triumph: the 'bells' of 'Le campane dell'Ave Maria' are especially captivating. And there is no better way to end such a recital, surely, than with the contrasting pair of Santiago de Murcia's Grabe from the Codice Sadivar, in which Mönkemeyer is beautifully supported by Andreas Arend's theorbo, and Soler's dazzling Fandango. Recorded sound is excellent.

#### Ivan Moody

#### 'Bass & Mandolin'

Thile/Meyer Why Only One?. Tarnation. The Auld Beagle. Big Top. Look What I Found. El cinco real. Friday. Monkey Actually. I'll Remember For You. It's Dark in Here Chris Thile mand/gtr Edgar Meyer db/pf Nonesuch © 7559 79538-3 (47' • DDD)



Whether it's by playing solo Bach with astonishing physical and

intellectual dexterity, jamming with the likes of Yo-Yo Ma, Joshua Bell and Emanuel Ax or penning complex genredefying music, these two MacArthur Fellowship winners have earned their classical chops and no justification is needed for reviewing their second duo album here. Other than to say that it's brilliant.

Mandolinist Chris Thile, of Nickel Creek and Punch Brothers fame, and



Both blues and Bach running through their veins: Chris Thile with his mandolin and Edgar Meyer with his bass

multi-Grammy Award-winning double bassist Edgar Meyer have always been willing to push the envelope when it comes to extending the range and scope of traditional American music, in Thile's case bluegrass in particular and to such an extent it's sometimes cost him fans. 'Bass & Mandolin' features 10 original compositions that run the gamut from the accessible to the arcane and the sweet to the strident.

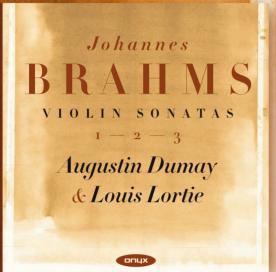
Compare the subtly textured Look What I Found for mandolin and piano or the ravishing pointillistics of I'll Remember For

You for guitar and piano with the furious, dangerously addictive celerity of Tarnation or the spiky angularity of Big Top, both for mandolin and double bass: despite the wild gear-changes in style and mood, both blues and Bach run through all their veins. And if El cinco real leads you a dizzying barnyard dance, The Auld Beagle offers up a warm, punch-drunk dream.

If the combination of mandolin and double bass might at first seem counter-intuitive, in the hands of Thile and Meyer it seems the most natural thing in the world. William Yeoman



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**Anja Lechner** *VC* **François Couturier** *pf* ECM New Series (F) 481 0992 (57" • DDD)



The German cellist Anja Lechner, best known to *Gramophone* readers as a founder

member of the Rosamunde Quartet, works frequently with friends from across generic divides. She most recently appeared alongside jazz pianist and composer François Couturier on the crossover album 'Il Pergolese' (2/14), which Lindsay Kemp welcomed as 'one of the most genuinely creative projects of its kind that I have come across'. This new disc is a less focused affair, combining cello and piano arrangements of relatively familiar miniatures by Federico Mompou (1893-1987) with items attributed to the philosopher-mystic-guru George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (c1877-1949). Lechner previously explored the latter's musical legacy in the company of pianist Vassilis Tsabropoulos, also for ECM. A secondary strand is provided by Komitas Vardapet, born Sogomon Sogomonian (1869-1935), whose honorific names have been variously transliterated from the Armenian: soprano Isabel Bayrakdarian's selection (Nonesuch, 12/08) was credited to Gomidas Vartaled. A damaged survivor of the Armenian genocide, this priest-singer-musicologist ended his days in a Parisian mental hospital. In fact residency in the French capital provides the one tenuous thread linking all the creative voices featured on 'Moderato cantabile'. Couturier himself, solely responsible for several tracks, lives in its suburbs.

Production standards are reliably exquisite – one expects nothing less from this source – but I did find myself dropping off. Whatever the fancy aspirations set forth in the booklet-notes, the duo settle for relaxed, vaguely ethnic, New Age background music in which one piece segues imperceptibly into the next and rough edges are smoothed away. Purists will run a mile given the manner in which the material has been cut about, rescored and revoiced. More Canteloube than Bartók, more Einaudi than Nyman, the less harmonically adventurous tracks

are just right for Classic FM's smooth classics concept. That said, listeners in search of a mood of limpid repose could do a great deal worse. Lechner and her partner are seriously accomplished and sensitive players.

David Gutman

#### 'The Pianos Trio'

'Live in Lugano'

Boccadoro Vaalbara Debussy La mer Offenbach Gaîté parisienne Shostakovich Moscow, Cheryomushki Stravinsky The Firebird (all arr Griguoli) Alessandro Stella, Giorgia Tomassi, Carlo Maria Griguoli pss

Warner Classics © 2564 62880-7 (76' • DDD) Recorded live 2010-13



These recordings are all of live performances given during Martha

Argerich's Lugano Festival between 2010 and 2013. The Pianos Trio is a remarkable group; from the start of the first track (Shostakovich), we're captivated by the players' lively touch, buoyant rhythms, wonderful precision and command of the different textural possibilities offered by three pianos. The arrangements, by Carlo Maria Griguoli, are done with much expertise and imagination, and the one original piece uses the ensemble's possibilities in a most striking way.

Vaalbara, the name given to the first, gigantic continent to appear on earth, is an extremely graphic piece. Enormous volcanic rumblings alternate with flying eruptions of sparks and flames, and the music has an aura of unapproachable remoteness. The trio projects all these aspects with vivid conviction.

The more light-hearted items by Offenbach and Shostakovich both work well, especially the Shostakovich, whose wit is brought out by the performance's impeccable timing. La mer, however, seems to me a step too far - only the second movement retains something of the atmosphere of the orchestral original. The mystery of the work's opening, as dawn breaks over the sea, is quite lost without the instrumental colouring and the ubiquitous tremolo (necessary to prolong pitches as well as in imitation of the strings) becomes wearisome. The Firebird is another matter; full of variety and pianistic colour, incisive rhythms, brilliant arabesques and haunting melodies, all finely presented by this talented group. **Duncan Druce** 

#### 'Verso Venezia'

Castello Sonate concertate in stil moderno -No 1; No 2; No 7; No 8 Legrenzi Sonatas, Op 2 -'La Donata'; 'La Foscari'. Sonata, 'La Galini', Op 8 No 5. La cetra, Op 10 - No 5 Merula II quarto libro delle canzoni da suonare - No 11, 'La Miradoro'; No 12, 'La Scarinza'; No 14, 'La Cappellina'; No 17, 'La Monteverde'

Pallade Musica

ATMA Classique © ACD2 2697 (65' • DDD)



Seventeenth-century Venice witnessed spectacular musical developments, from

the polychoral liturgical motets of Gabrieli to the establishment of Europe's first competing professional opera houses (Cavalli etc). Another aspect of north Italian musical culture during the seicento is the small-scale sonata for solo treble instrument and basso continuo accompaniment. Pallade Musica perform sonatas or canzonas by three different composers who had varying degrees of association with Venice.

Giovanni Legrenzi (1626-90) worked in his native Bergamo and Ferrara, and eventually got the top job at St Mark's. His sonata *La Galini* illustrates a compact idiom distinct from the florid divisions of the earlier pioneer Dario Castello, a cornettist and leader of the wind ensemble at St Mark's Basilica, whose two collections of sonatas were published in 1621 and 1629 respectively. Constructed on contrasting tempi and moods, Castello's pieces were advertised as Sonate concertate in stil moderno in order to make it clear that these were essays in a new elaborate style. The emotive contrasts and technical demands of these diverse sonatas are exploited adroitly by the violinist Tanya LaPerrière, whose fantastic bow work and expressive freedom function in rapturous dialogue with cellist Elinor Frey. Theorbist Esteban La Rotta and harpsichordist Mylène Bélanger provide expert realisations, and the quartet conjure a kaleidoscope of colours, adventurous spontaneity and imaginative continuo realisations in Castello's Sonata prima from the 1629 set. The occasional use of organ as an alternative texture works wisely, such as in the dance-like canzons La Cappellina and La Scarinza by the Cremonese organist and violinist Tarquino Merula (c1594-1665), published at Venice in 1651. David Vickers

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## Antal Dorati

Rob Cowan profiles the Hungarian-born American conductor and composer who made a difference wherever he went and left a vast and varied recording legacy

He was the pushy middleweight:

rhythms with unflagging energy'

assertive, light on his feet, punching out

ntal Dorati was one of a select number of notable 20th-century conductors whose professional image was shaped largely by the record company he was most readily associated with. The distinctive way in which his performances were recorded (most importantly by Mercury) suggested, at least to those who knew him through listening at home, that the man was the sound they were hearing. And he wasn't alone in that. If Herbert von Karajan on DG came across as the designer smoothy and Otto Klemperer on Columbia seemed the granitic sage, Dorati on Mercury Living Presence was the pushy middleweight: assertive, light on his feet, punching out rhythms with unflagging energy (especially in Bartók

Dorati was born on April 9, 1906; his father was a violinist with the Budapest Philharmonic Orchestra and his mother was a piano

and Stravinsky).

teacher. He studied at the Franz Liszt Academy with Kodály, Leó Weiner (both composition) and Bartók (piano). His links with Bartók continued for many years, and after Bartók's death he conducted the first performance of his Viola Concerto (as completed by Tibor Serly) and made many unforgettable recordings of his music.

Dorati made his conducting debut in 1924 with the Hungarian State Opera. Like so many fine conductors of his generation (for example Martinon and Kubelík), he was additionally motivated by a strong desire to compose, and he not only wrote original works but also arranged pieces by other composers, including the music by Johann Strauss II for the

ballet Graduation Ball - of which he conducted the premiere, in 1940. After his spell at the Budapest Opera he went to the Dresden Opera to take up the post of assistant to Fritz Busch before he was appointed Music Director of Münster Opera, where he stayed until 1933. He then joined the conducting staff of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo. During the 1930s, in addition to his Ballet Russe engagements, he began guest conducting in Europe and America. As Music Director of the new American Ballet Theatre (from 1941) he was

able to demonstrate his ability to build an orchestra. This was a fairly dazzling phase in Dorati's career. Most notably, he revitalised the Dallas Symphony Orchestra during his 1945-49 tenure, when he made the first of three recordings of Bartók's Second Violin Concerto with Yehudi Menuhin.

There can be little doubt, however, that Dorati's period with the Minneapolis Symphony Orchestra (1949-60) was the high point of his career. Aside from his epoch-making concert programmes (many rarities have been released on the orchestra's own label), Dorati's Mercury Living Presence recordings in the fabled Northrop Auditorium inspire a sense of wonderment to this day, and many of them are now

available on CD. Highlights include complete recordings of the three Tchaikovsky ballets, a *Rite of Spring* that raised the roof (a stereo remake did likewise), Copland's Third Symphony

and music from *Rodeo*, major symphonies by Beethoven, Brahms and Tchaikovsky, and much, much more. All attest to an interpretative vitality that remained unflagging throughout the period.

Dorati's Mercury sojourn also witnessed superlative (mono) recordings with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (not least a benchmark account of Bartók's *Miraculous Mandarin* Suite) and the London Symphony Orchestra (starting from the mid-1950s, by which time the Mercury 'Living Stereo' technique was ruling the audiophiles' roost). Dorati's texturally luminous LSO recordings of the six Tchaikovsky symphonies, *The Nutcracker* (complete ballet) and various

other Russian dazzlers still have the capacity to thrill, and the orchestra has rarely emerged on disc as more musical or better drilled. Other orchestras that Dorati recorded with for Mercury include Philharmonia Hungarica (made up of refugees from the 1956 uprising) and the BBC Symphony Orchestra, of which Dorati was Principal Conductor from 1963 to 1966, a period that brought fresh vigour to the orchestra's programmes. He then took over the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic

#### DEFINING MOMENTS

#### • 1924 – Conducting debut

Soon after graduating at the age of 18, appointed the youngest-ever conductor of the Budapest Opera House.

#### • 1934-1941 – All about ballet

Becomes Second Conductor then Music Director of the Ballet Russe de Monte Carlo, and subsequently of the American Ballet Theatre in New York. Records significant portions of Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake* ballet with the LPO.

#### •1945-1949 – America: the high point

Directs and greatly revitalises the Dallas Symphony Orchestra. Becomes Music Director of the Minneapolis Symphony in 1949, where he stays for 11 years and makes some spectacular recordings.

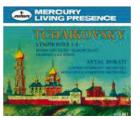
#### •1963 – BBC appointment

Appointed Chief Conductor of the BBC Symphony Orchestra, where he makes his first recording of the complete ballet *Miraculous Mandarin* by Bartók.



Orchestra (from 1966) and the National Symphony Orchestra of Washington (1970-77), as well as working with the Detroit Symphony Orchestra (a former jewel in Mercury's crown). He recorded with all three orchestras (for Decca with the Detroit SO). In addition, he continued to guest conduct and form close relationships with other orchestras. He recorded all of Haydn's symphonies with Philharmonia Hungarica, as well as eight of Haydn's operas with the Lausanne Chamber Orchestra. Over the years, his 600-odd recordings (some dating from the shellac era), not to mention his many other musical skills, won him numerous prizes and honours. When he retired, he was able to turn to other creative outlets, such as writing, drawing and painting.

As he grew older, Dorati's approach changed somewhat. Rhythms were less taut, lines were more flexible, and the range of textures he drew from his orchestras were generally mellower and more varied than they had been. Had the prizefighter's punch lost its bruising power or was wisdom taking the upper hand? I guess the jury is still out on that one. In 1983 Dorati was appointed KBE. He died in 1988 at the age of 82 in Gerzensee, Switzerland. **6** 



#### THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING

Tchaikovsky Symphonies Nos 1-6. Romeo and Juliet. Marche slave. Francesca da Rimini, etc LSO; Minneapolis SO / Dorati Mercury ③ ⑤ → 475 6261MM5 (12/04)

## Instrumental



#### Bryce Morrison on the second Chopin disc from David Wilde:

'There are thunderous bass reinforcements and a near-quadruple fortissimo at the return of the theme' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 58



#### Jeremy Nicholas listens to Wagner transcribed for solo piano:

'A programme enriched by a velvet touch, meticulous voicing and judicious attention to detail' > REVIEW ON PAGE 67

#### JS Bach

Six Cello Suites, BWV1007-1012

Nina Kotova VC

Wayney Classics ® © 3554 530411 (137) - DD

Warner Classics ® ② 2564 63941-1 (137' • DDD)

#### **JS Bach**

Cello Suites - No 2, BWV1008; No 4, BWV1010; No 6, BWV1012 **Ditta Rohmann** *VC* Hungaroton ® HCD32732 (73' • DDD)





If there is one thing all cellists agree on, it is that the Bach cello suites are not repertoire that should be committed to disc until you can produce a performance that is underpinned by a clear sense of musical intention and, to that end, Nina Kotova's playing is still a little inconsistent. When she hits her stride her playing shows considerable poise, but when she does not it sounds too angry to be artistically generous. There needs to be a good reason to add to the overstuffed catalogue of versions of the cello suites, and here the unhelpful proximity and brightness of the recording is so extreme that every subtlety that is missed is amplified to the point of unfair impression of artistic merit. There is a strong sense of individuality and strength in Kotova's playing but this is still manifest more as a desire to control the music than to allow it to control without a surrender of integrity. Moreover, it is a control that is exerted with such force that it also occasionally bends the tuning out of shape and loses a certain amount of precision and finesse in the phrasing.

It makes for a stressful listen, when far less frustrating is Ditta Rohmann's unassuming performance on Hungaroton. As does Isabelle Faust in her superlative solo Bach recordings (Harmonia Mundi, 6/10, 11/12), Rohmann uses metal strings but a Baroque bow, with which she attains an authentically Baroque clarity and

cleanness but without the lurking threat that too much pressure on the string inevitably brings. Rohmann is also able to keep the tempi nimble where needed but to create an expansive expressiveness in the slower movements, which is particularly noticeable in the mercurial Second Suite. Her unusual but historically informed ordering of the Suites ends with the most complex, the Sixth, which she plays on a five-string piccolo cello. This retains the original chordal textures, placing of open strings and resulting harmonic effect that combine to create a ghostly sound that brings yet another facet to these masterworks, and brings to an end a project that should file Rohmann's two volumes (the first was reviewed in May) on the shelf under 'definitive'. Caroline Gill

#### **CPE Bach**

'Rondos & Fantasias'
Fantasias - Wq58/6; Wq59/5; Wq59/6; Wq61/6.
Rondos - Wq56/1; Wq56/5; Wq57/1; Wq57/3;
Wq57/5; Wq58/3; Wq58/5; Wq59/4; Wq61/4
Christine Schornsheim tangent pf

Capriccio (F) C5201 (74' • DDD)



Although Christine Schornsheim has recorded sound and stylish JS Bach

interpretations, she truly lets loose with his son Carl Philipp Emanuel. Her keyboard of choice is an 1801 'Tangentenflügel' that purports to fuse the best that the clavichord, harpsichord and fortepiano have to offer in regard to timbre and dynamics. It may not be an instrument of which the composer had first-hand knowledge, yet it perfectly lends itself to his imaginative and volatile idiom.

Schornsheim gives dramatic and colourful shape to the opening E flat Fantasia's cresting arpeggiations and spices up the melodic whimsy in the B flat major and C minor Rondos with split-second pauses between certain phrases. She heightens the contrast between the C major

Rondo's phrases that alternate between a deadpan repeated middle C and more decorative high-register writing. Her agogic distensions in the A minor Rondo help to illuminate the music's unexpected twists of melody and harmony. The use of a 'harp' pedal adds a haunting, disembodied timbral dimension to the E major Rondo Wq58/3's long legato lines, as well as a woodwind-like patina to the G major Rondo's seemingly childlike tunes. Discreet yet noticeable pedal effects underline the F major Fantasia's unpredictable cadences and ear-catching dissonant nuggets. Perhaps the other E major Rondo (Wq57/1) best showcases Schornsheim's ingenuous sense of timing, as the music wanders through as many moods as changes of kev.

A booklet interview with Schornsheim reveals her to be just as intelligent, insightful and witty away from the keyboard, while the superb engineering creates a warm and resonant ambience that makes the instrument come alive. In short, this is one of the CPE Bach anniversary year's more delectable offerings. Jed Distler

#### **Barton**

Birdsong at Dusk. Improvisation. Petrichore.
7/8 Not Too Late. Dreamtime Duet. Didge Fusion
William Barton didjeridu/gtr/voc with
Delmae Barton voc Kurilpa Quartet
ABC Classics (F) ABC481 0962 (42' • DDD)



Many cultural events in Australia are preceded by a Welcome to

Country, a short yet beautiful ceremony in which a respected member of the Aboriginal community welcomes the audience on to his or her traditional land. This live recording by Queensland-born William Barton, one of Australia's greatest and most ambitious didjeridu exponents, is a long-distance Welcome to Country of sorts, evoking the unique grandeur of Australia's landscape and its

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flora and fauna in original compositions that are modern and ancient, Western and Indigenous.

When you play the didjeridu – essentially a drone instrument but through vocalisations and rhythmic control of the breath capable of an infinite variety of mimetic and more abstract effects – your entire being vibrates with it. Thus are you connected with the universe. Barton's genius is to connect song, percussion, bowed and plucked strings, as well as Western compositional techniques and improvisation, to erase any sense of a clash of cultures. There is only one universe and we're all part of it.

You can hear it from the outset in the haunting title-track, *Birdsong at Dusk*, which opens the album, the wonderful Kurilpa Quartet evoking the waves outside the Queensland beach house where Barton wrote the work as his song rises like the seagulls above them, the didjeridu mediating between the two. You can hear it, too, in Delmae Barton's soulful vocalises in *Improvisation* and *Dreamtime Duet*, violinist John Rodgers's ethereal calligraphy in *Didge Fusion* and Barton's pulsating rhythms in 7/8 Not Too Late. This is chamber music at its most primal and contemporary. William Yeoman

#### **Beethoven**



Piano Sonatas - No 14, 'Moonlight', Op 27 No 2; No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106. Die Ruinen von Athen, Op 113 (arr Bax) - Chorus of Whirling Dervishes; Turkish March

Alessio Bax pf Signum ® SIGCD397 (62' • DDD)



Often known as 'the Mount Everest of the keyboard', Beethoven's

Hammerklavier Sonata poses every conceivable problem, musically and technically (though the two are indissoluble). Even Myra Hess, a great Beethoven pianist, was daunted by its demands, leaving it to others for public performance. For Alessio Bax the challenge remains, but is superbly resolved in a reading of a formidable pace and impetus yet leaving ample time for expressive resource. His opening Allegro is like a river in full spate (though sharply focused rather than, as in Schnabel's case, a frenetic race against the clock). At the same time the great Adagio sostenuto, appassionato e con molto sentimento is just that, finely shaded and tautly disciplined, while Bax's final fugue, rapid and resolute,



Alessio Bax's Hammerklavier: a reading of formidable pace and expression

is, as Stravinsky put it, 'contemporary forever'. Even when compared to legendary performances of this sonata (Kempff, Richter, Gilels, Brendel, etc), this performance stands its ground in music to test the technique and intellect of even the greatest pianists.

Bax's Moonlight Sonata opens with a fastflowing andante rather than adagio, yet the playing is so fine-toned and poetically responsive that it creates its own classic sheen. His central Allegretto is bright and perky (quite without, say, Arrau's overemphasis) and in the finale he creates a furious tempest of sound, with sforzando chords at the apex of each phrase like pistol shots. For a step into the light there are two Beethoven-Bax encores, the Chorus of the Whirling Dervishes and Turkish March from *The Ruins of Athens*, both as dazzling as they are witty (the former with an Alkanesque turn of mind). Finely recorded, Alessio Bax is clearly among the most remarkable young pianists now before the public. **Bryce Morrison** 

#### **Beethoven**

Variations on a Waltz by Anton Diabelli, Op 120 **Christina Bjørkøe** *pf* Danacord (© DACOCD747 (73' • DDD)



Because Beethoven's Diabelli Variations usually last anywhere from 45 to 58 minutes,

I wondered if the 72-and-a-half-minute timing for Christina Bjørkøe's was a misprint. Evidently not. She plays the Vivace slowly, broaching each phrase in a tentative, questioning manner, and softens Var 1's dynamics and loosens its tenacious slow marching pulse. She swoons all over No 4, handles No 5's repeated note/chord up-beats with kid gloves, and rounds off the ends of No 6's trilled phrases. A hint of incisiveness seems to peer through No 7, yet the Poco vivace No 8 slows down to a suave crawl. By contrast, No 9's Allegro pesante e risoluto is too fast and rhythmically slack. No 10's rapid figurations are steady and controlled, if slower than presto. No 11's opening phrases disintegrate in slow motion, taking Beethoven's Allegretto directive with them to the grave. Similarly, No 13's Vivace becomes an andante, thereby deflating the humour in Beethoven's silences.

No 14 conveys a sense of a sustained long line, even at its record-breaking eightminute duration (most pianists require four minutes). In fairness, Nos 16 through 18 come closer to 'normalcy' in the tempo department, despite No 17's poorly articulated octaves. While super slow motion returns for Nos 18 and 21, No 19's Presto is deftly dispatched. In No 22 (the variation based on Mozart's 'Notte e giorno faticar'), Bjørkøe gets the rhythm wrong in bar 4, but No 25 is surprisingly light, supple and centred. Given Bjørkøe's direct and musicianly Bach and Nielsen recordings, her bizarre Beethoven is hard to fathom, justify or recommend, except for collectors of curiosities. Jed Distler

#### Beethoven · Brahms

**Beethoven** Piano Sonata No 29, 'Hammerklavier', Op 106 **Brahms** Piano Sonata No 1, Op 1 **Adam Golka** pf

First Hand (F) FHR33 (75' • DDD)



After Brahms performed his First Piano Sonata, a friend mentioned the

resemblance between its opening theme and that of Beethoven's *Hammerklavier* Sonata, to which the composer gruffly replied 'Any ass can hear that!' Since this apocryphal story refuses to die, Adam Golka has decided

to couple the works on disc for the first time, so he claims. Taking Brahms's first movement at a genuine, fluid allegro, Golka manages to make the thick staccato chords sound supple without sacrificing their orchestral heft. Although Golka doesn't differentiate the Andante's marcato repeated notes to the multi-dimensional extent of Krystian Zimerman's long-deleted reference version (DG, 6/80), his subtle harmonic inflections and vocally informed legato prove no less exquisite. The Scherzo has impressive rhythmic spring but the Allegro con fuoco finale's momentum flags next to Zimerman or Katchen, who goose up the basic pulse to ensure cumulative sweep.

Golka's well-oiled fingers navigate the Beethoven's first-movement technical provocations fluently, with amazingly even trills to boot. However, telegraphed dynamics, ritards less effective than those indicated by the composer, plus a rather stiff and texturally cluttered central fughetta yield to Igor Levit's superior dynamism and headlong drama (Sony, 11/13). Golka's impeccable yet square-toed, slightly careful Scherzo lacks Pollini's intensity and Peter Serkin's winged nervous energy. At 19 minutes, Golka's Adagio sostenuto conveys breadth and sustaining power, even while dynamically holding back in the anguished climaxes. What seem like unusually clipped bass notes in the fourth-movement introduction actually represent Golka observing Beethoven's pedal markings. Aside from a few mannered phrasings that draw more attention to Golka than to Beethoven in the fugue exposition, his suave dispatch of the combative contrapuntal writing evokes Solomon's classic recording, in contrast to the jazzy, stinging darts that Stewart Goodyear's altogether brasher hands (Marquis, A/11) throw every which way. While this excellently produced disc undoubtedly showcases Golka's proficient capabilities, his live performances of these daunting works (available on YouTube) take more chances. Jed Distler

#### Chopin

'Wilde Plays Chopin, Vol 2' Fantaisie, Op 49. Nocturnes - No 2, Op 9 No 2; No 7, Op 27 No 1; No 8, Op 27 No 2. Piano Sonata No 2, Op 35. Polonaise No 6, 'Heroic', Op 53. 'Raindrop' Prelude, Op 28 No 15

David Wilde pf

Delphian (F) DCD34138 (78' • DDD)



For his second Delphian Chopin disc, David Wilde offers a determined attack on conventional wisdom. Here is no 'sick-room talent' (John Field) or salon dandy concerned about the cut of his trousers but an epic, gnarled and rugged genius shaking his fist at the universe with all the defiance of King Lear ('Blow, winds, and crack your cheeks!').

Refusing to take anything at face value, his performances scorn a more familiar suave and evasive outlook. He opens with the C sharp minor Nocturne, Op 27, finding ample support for his approach in its gaunt and baleful progression and bringing the dark and menacing rise in the central section to a rhetorical uproar. There is weight rather than facility in the 'hoof-beats of the Polish Cavalry' (Liszt) at the heart of the A flat Polonaise, heroic testimony, indeed, to Chopin's patriotic fervour. Wilde stretches his points in the Second Sonata's death-haunted pages. There are thunderous bass reinforcements and a near-quadruple fortissimo at the return of the principal theme in the Funeral March (echoing a Romantic tradition, most notably from Rachmaninov). Again, there is nothing sotto voce about the phantom finale but a gusty chasing of melodic fragments during its nightmarish course. For the D flat ('Raindrop') Prelude Wilde adopts a more natural, less singlemindedly different line, though there are thunderclaps aplenty in the central section's downpour. In the E flat Nocturne, Op 9, on the other hand, his rubato tugs heavily against a more natural impetus, something that is nonetheless part and parcel of his uncompromising approach.

In his long and deeply personal essay he scorns all easy facility, using the word 'gothic' most aptly in relation to the B flat minor Sonata. Some may accuse him of assault and battery but others will surely pause to think again about Chopin's stature. Delphian's sound is crystal-clear and beyond reproach. Bryce Morrison

#### G Cooke · Holst · Vaughan Williams

'A Forgotten English Romantic' **G Cooke** Over the Hills: A Suite of Three Short
Pieces. Bargain Basement: A Suite of Seven
Pieces. Three Pieces. Gothic Prelude. High Marley
Rest. Whispering Willows. In the Cathedral. Song
Prelude. Cormorant Crag. Haldon Hills.
Meadowsweet. Sundown. Reef's End **Holst**Nocturne **Vaughan Williams** A Little Piano Book **Duncan Honeybourne** pf

EM Records (F) EMRCDO22 (77' • DDD)



How aware are we of the immense influence of Tobias Matthay, an RAM teacher whose innumerable pupils included Myra Hess, Irene Scharrer, Clifford Curzon, York Bowen, Harold Craxton, Harriet Cohen and Moura Lympany? Indeed, my own piano teacher of my now distant youth was a pupil, as was the teacher (Rosemary Wright) of the sympathetic pianist in this recording, Duncan Honeybourne. Matthay, who taught Greville Cooke at the RAM, had hopes that his gifted pupil would develop a career as a concert pianist. Instead, Cooke studied at Cambridge, took holy orders and spent his life as a rural Anglican priest while teaching piano at the RAM between 1925 and 1959.

Cooke's style, most affecting in lyrical mood, breathes something of that luxuriant Romanticism with which we are now much more familiar in the piano music of York Bowen. Its subtle combination of diatonicism and suave chromaticism has a haunting, nostalgic quality which, at its best in *High Marley Rest* (a tribute to Matthay's country home near Haslemere), *Whispering Willows*, the fantasy-like *In the Cathedral*, the introspective *Song Prelude* and the more extrovert tone-poem *Cormorant Crag*, exudes a melancholy English yearning in its seamless melody and metrical freedom. From the range of pieces here,

Honeybourne, with his delicate chemistry of touch and arm weight (watchwords for Matthay), persuasively coaxes out Cooke's personal sense of poetry and gentle humour. Holst's neo-classical *Nocturne* and Vaughan William's *A Little Piano Book*, much of it Bach-inspired, provide an effective foil. Jeremy Dibble

#### **Deane**

Noctuary **Hugh Tinney** pf

Resonus ® → RES10133

(47' • DDD • resonusclassics.com)



The greater recorded availability of Irish new music over these past two decades has

enabled composers such as Raymond Deane (60 last year) to gain a much-needed hearing. Certainly his unequivocal stance is impressively manifest in *Noctuary* (2011) – 12 'night pieces' are divided into two books that imaginatively traverse the spectrum of post-war piano-writing.

Over its course, salient aspects unify what might otherwise have been a disparate

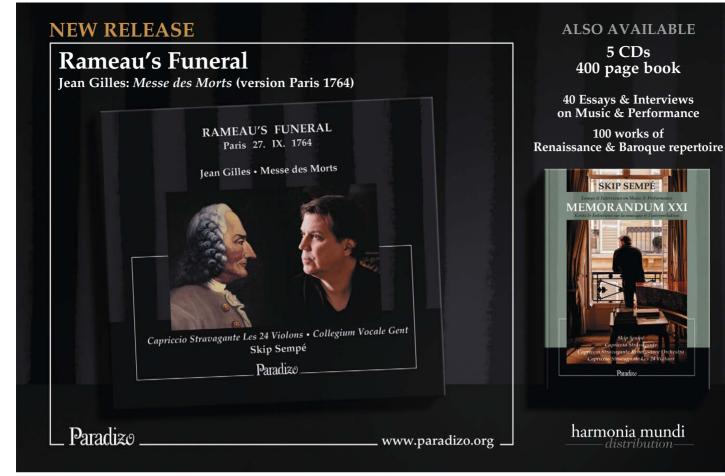
sequence. Hence the C sharp minor tonality informing the ruminative opening 'Minerva's Owl...', that returns (albeit from a D flat vantage) in the speculative close of the final 'Couchant'; or the interplay of thirds in the atmospheric 'Duskiss' which contracts into a haunting dyad motif that ruffles the ethereal unfolding of 'Cereus'. Other pieces here have a distinctive character redolent of (if not beholden to) earlier models - notably the Carter-like contrasts in texture and register in 'Mezzotint' or Ligetian play with asynchronous phrases in 'Night Watches'. Starkly contrasted with each other, the various motivic inter-connections across and between pieces ensure that the cycle as a whole feels much more than the sum of its individual parts.

That it is the case is due in no small part to the artistry of Hugh Tinney, whose sheer breadth of repertoire has made possible a range of major retrospectives as well as expanding present-day pianism, and who has been recorded in an immediate yet not too confined acoustic. Pithy notes on each piece by the composer further enhance another notable release from Resonus.

Richard Whitehouse



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#### Gramophone Editor's Choice Recordings

# Disc of the month

Two Violin Concertos, Chaconne Bach JS Joshua Bell £11.00 Bach JS Mass in B minor (2cd) Cohen £20.50 Beethoven Piano Sonatas 14 & 29 etc. Alessio Bax £11.00 Chopin # Preludes Ingrid Fliter £11.25 Murray Perahia £12.50 Chopin Perahia Plays Chopin (6cD) Debussy Images, Préludes II Hamelin £10.25 Stabat Mater, Te Deum Howells Hill £ 6.00 Symphony No. 5 (DVD) Leipzig, Chailly £18.00 Mahler The Bells Of Dawn Hvorostovsky £11.00 A Royal Trio (SACD) Zazzo, Bates £11.00 Stella di Napoli Joyce DiDonato £ 9.00 Ćecilia Bartoli £12.50 St Petersburg (+ Deluxe Book)

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#### **Debussy**

Images, Books 1 & 2. Préludes, Book 2 **Marc-André Hamelin** pf

Hyperion (F) CDA67920 (71' • DDD)



Marc-André Hamelin's stature, extraordinary from the start, increases with every

new issue. And here in his latest album he subdues his legendary, transcendent technique to convey Debussy's very essence with a surpassing ease and naturalness. For him, personal idiosyncrasy or impediment – a determination to be different at all costs – would affront Debussy's genius, and so he offers profoundly expressive yet lucid and transparent insights into the composer's teeming imagination.

His opening to 'Reflets dans l'eau' is hauntingly shaded and indolent; and in the final pages, when the ripples move outwards from the centre, there is an uncanny sense of stillness and resolution. In 'Cloches à travers les feuilles' the funeral bells toll from village to village, from All Saints' Day to All Souls' Day with a special poignancy, while in 'Brouillards' there is a superb if unintentional riposte to a drier French tradition (exemplified at its least engaging in, for example, Cécile Ousset's recording) with an uncanny sense of eerily shifting mist and flickering half-lights. In 'Hommage à S Pickwick Esq' you sense how, as Roger Nichols puts it in his scholarly, witty and sensitive notes, Debussy 'rather admired English sangfroid (those were the days...), but was not beyond giving it the occasional dig in the ribs'. Finally, 'Feux d'artifice' and a fiery display of Bengal lights, pinwheels and soaring rockets resolved in a distant fragment of the Marseillaise.

The poetic sheen and finish of all these performances are things to marvel at, leaving me to long for more Debussy, to say nothing of Fauré and Ravel, from an artist supremely attuned to the French repertoire, as to so much else. Hamelin's glistening sonority is flawlessly captured by the Hyperion team. This is a disc to treasure. Bryce Morrison

#### **Debussy · Ravel**

**Debussy** La mer **Ravel** Boléro. Daphnis et Chloé - Lever du jour. Pavane pour une infante défunte. La valse. Valses nobles et sentimentales - No 2; No 3 (all arr Idenstam) **Gunnar Idenstam** *org* 



The Swedish virtuoso Gunnar Idenstam tells us that he has toyed with the idea of

arranging Debussy's La mer for organ ever since his student days. Having tried out various passages over the years, 'each time I have returned the [score and piano reduction] to the cupboard thinking it just can't be done'. Idenstam's doubts were understandable and, sadly, justified; for while one can only applaud the ingenuity of his transcription and the extraordinary technique needed to play it, I think La mer is one of those works that do not transfer to another medium. The Stahlhuth/Jann organ of the Eglise Saint-Martin de Dudelange, Luxembourg, is a powerful symphonic instrument supplying all the orchestral colours you could wish for (it has particularly lovely flutes, solo clarinet and punchy reed chorus) but the harp (especially in 'Jeux de vagues'), percussion and string pizzicato are such important elements of Debussy's palette that the organ simply cannot reproduce their role to comparable effect.

To a lesser extent the same problem besets La valse. Too often the basic pulse is obscured (the cathedral rumble of a 32- or even 16-foot pedal doesn't provide the necessary pinpoint definition) and the final pages, so thrilling in their orchestral, piano solo or two-piano versions, are here merely sonically awesome. How Idenstam's left hand maintains the side drum's role for the nearly 16 minutes of Boléro is something to wonder at. The inexorable crescendo is skilfully graded but again at the climax the famous key-change – the spine fails to tingle. For me, the two wholly successful transcriptions are 'Lever du jour' and the Pavane. Despite my reservations, these should not deter organ aficionados from savouring a programme of rich ambition and imagination. Jeremy Nicholas

#### **Dowland**

'Master Dowland's Midnight'
Awake, sweet love. Captain Digorie Pipers
Galliard. A Coy Joy. A Fancy. Fortune. Frog
Galliard. The King of Denmark, his Galliard.
Lachrimae Pavan. Lady Hunsdon's Puffe.
Lady Rich, her Galliard. Lord Strang's March.
Melancholy Galliard. Mr Dowland's Midnight.
Mrs Winter's Jump. Mrs Nichols' Almain.
Mrs White's Nothing. My Lord Willoughby's
Welcome Home. Orlando Sleepeth. Preludium.
Queen Elizabeth, her Galliard. Round Battle
Galliard. The Shoemaker's Wife. Sir John Smith,
his Almain. Tarleton's Riserrectione. What if a
day (all arr Denoth)

#### GRAMOPHONE Archive

#### **Debussy's piano Images**

Three recordings that came before Hamelin's, and how Gramophone rated them



#### MARCH 1954

**Debussy** Images, Books 1 & 2

Walter Gieseking pf

Columbia **3**3CX1137 (12in • 36s 5½d)

Walter Gieseking's Debussy

performances are definitive, and this present disc is beautifully engineered. He captures to perfection the characteristics of each piece and his performance abounds in those delicacies of tone and inflexion to which one will turn again and again in pleasure and admiration. This varied music Gieseking renders with consummate art, and the engineers have captured to perfection his delicate colouring and shading.

## GRAMOPHONI

#### **DECEMBER 1971**

Debussy Images, Books 1 & 2 Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli pf DGG ● 2530 196 (£2.35)

Looked at from all aspects this is a superb, a miraculous disc;

no Debussy piano music has ever been more successfully recorded, not by Gieseking, not by anyone. Michelangeli's Debussy is at once strongly atmospheric and crystal clear. He treats nothing as mere 'texture', nothing as a peg on which to hang 'pianism', nothing as a mere pattern of notes to be thrown into the melting-pot of 'effect'. He seems to have discovered the logical, musical place and weight for every note; and the result is the strongest, most colourful, most musical and most poetic Debussy you ever heard from a pianist, corresponding exactly to Debussy's own view of what his music is all about. Stephen Plaistow



#### DECEMBER 2008

**Debussy** Images, Books 1 & 2 **Jean-Efflam Bavouzet** *pf* Chandos (© CHAN10497 (76' • DDD) Jean-Efflam Bavouzet's flexible virtuosity and innate grasp

of Debussy's style and sound world yields ravishing, freshly minted interpretations of the *Images* that proudly rank with (and sometimes surpass) the catalogue's reference versions. The *Images* gain welcome nourishment from Bavouzet's portfolio of ravishing colour shadings and articulations, while easily absorbing such pianistic liberties as playing one hand before the other, à la Michelangeli.

Read articles in full at the Gramophone Archive: for more information, visit **gramophone.co.uk**▶

gramophone.co.uk GRAMOPHONE NOVEMBER 2014 61

**Christoph Denoth** *gtr* Signum (F) SIGCD382 (55' • DDD)



As a sometime Lieder accompanist and conductor, Swiss-born guitarist Christoph

Denoth is superbly placed to exploit the *cantabile* and colouristic properties of his instrument. And if, like others before him, he is perhaps too ready to take John Dowland's melancholia at face value when it was really more a fashionable conceit than a pathological condition, it's this credulousness which gives his arrangements and their performances so much of their beauty and power.

Nowadays one is more likely to hear these works performed on the lute by such masters as Paul O'Dette, Hopkinson Smith and Nigel North, with guitarists such as Göran Söllscher or Evgeni Finkelstein usually incorporating his music into a broader recital programme. So it's a bonus to hear an entire recording such as this one devoted entirely to Dowland on the guitar.

Denoth has chosen to arrange a variety of pieces from across Dowland's oeuvre: pavans, galliards and other dances; fantasies and preludes; and variations on popular tunes and original songs. Their moods vary from the cheerful (Lady Hunsdon's Puffe), through the dramatic (A Fancy) to the genuinely melancholy (Melancholy Galliard). The arrangements are superb, adding the occasional few bars of divisions after Dowland's example and managing to remain faithful to the spirit of both the lute and the modern classical guitar. It's more in the broad tempi, clarity of voices and generous tonal palette that one detects the influence of Denoth's conducting teacher, Celibidache - an approach best exemplified by the extraordinary fey stateliness of the Lachrimae Pavan. William Yeoman

#### Hakim

Toccata. Petite Suite. Die Apostel<sup>a</sup>. Ave Maria (Fantasy on a Lied by Franz Schubert). Hommage à Jean Langlais. Esquisses Grégoriennes. Arabesques

Naji Hakim, <sup>a</sup>Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet org Signum © SIGCD389 (61' • DDD)

Played on the Schuke organ of the Palacio Euskalduna, Bilbao



Already well represented on disc, the music of Naji Hakim is the focus of the first in a new series from Signum Classics. Whether this is a series devoted to his music or to the 2000 Schuke organ in Bilbao is not clear – Hakim has recorded on Signum before – but both are worthy of further investigation.

The Petite Suite of 1983 affords us a splendid opportunity to sample some of the glittering reeds crowning the 71 speaking stops of this crisp and bright-voiced instrument. The other works here were all written since 2006 and are linked by their unbridled exuberance and cheerfulness. From the opening Toccata (2011) through to the closing 'Rondeau' from the 2009 suite Arabesques, Hakim pushes out extremely fast and jolly playing. Even Schubert's usually lyrical 'Ave Maria' becomes a breathless romp in Hakim's 2012 paraphrase, and was St Peter really the circus clown depicted in Die Apostel (2011)? Were it not Hakim himself playing, I might wonder whether occasionally enthusiasm for speed gets the better of technical discretion; but if the intention is to deliver the joy inherent in this music, he succeeds brilliantly.

For *Die Apostel*, portraits of the 12 Apostles devised as an organ duet, Hakim is joined by his wife, Marie-Bernadette Dufourcet, and so perfect is their musical partnership that it is easy to overlook that there are two players involved. It is to his wife that Hakim dedicated his *Arabesques* with its references (explicitly in the third of six brief dance movements) to his Lebanese origins.

I would welcome further discs devoted to Hakim's music, especially on this super organ, but it would be good to experience something a little more restrained and absorbing. This undiluted diet of playful boisterousness makes for exhausting listening.

Marc Rochester

#### Hindemith

Organ Sonatas - No 1; No 2; No 3, 'Nach alten Volksliedern'. Two Organ Pieces. Ludus tonalis -Eleven Interludes (transcr Dorfmüller)

Kirsten Sturm org

Naxos ® 8 573194 (72' • DDD)

Played on the Hubert Sandtner organ of St Martin's Cathedral, Rottenburg am Neckar, Germany



Hindemith's organ sonatas have had surprisingly few outings on CD, so

this new recording by a former pupil of Wolfgang Rübsam is welcome, even if Kirsten Sturm lacks the authority and instinct for this music that characterised Piet Kee's recordings on Chandos made over two decades ago.

Hindemith's often sparse textures demand great clarity of articulation and for the most part Kirsten Sturm manages well, although, particularly in the outer movements of the Second Sonata (notably around 1'10" in the Fugue), some ambiguous fingerwork is further clouded by the generous acoustic of Rottenburg Cathedral. She delivers Hindemith's crisp rhythms with considerable incisiveness which relaxes just enough, as in the opening of the Third Sonata, to prevent it sounding too mechanical; and, with the exception of the second movement of the First Sonata, which rather loses its focus, her readings have an invigorating sense of purpose. The 1979 Sandtner organ, with 61 stops spread over four manuals, occasionally seems a trifle hefty for this essential light-footed music but in the main Sturm's registrations are highly effective.

It is in the smaller pieces that this fine organ (and, for that matter, Sturm herself) really comes into its own. Written under enemy fire in the trenches of Flanders during the closing months of the First World War, one would have expected the Two Pieces to be rather less bright and cheerful than they are and, like the 11 nonfugal movements from *Ludus tonalis*, they are full of colour, charm and not a little humour – the third Interlude takes on a ridiculously clown-like character with its jaunty high flutes and growling bass reed. Sturm perfectly finds the measure of these delicate yet captivating miniatures.

#### Marc Rochester

Org Sons – selected comparison: Kee (12/92) (CHAN) CHAN9097

#### Schumann

Novelletten, Op 21. Nachtstucke, Op 23. Romanze, Op 28 No 2  ${\bf Danny\,Driver}\, \rho f$ 

Hyperion (E) CDA67983 (71' • DDD)



Perceiving series of pieces as inseparable, to be performed from first note to last, is a

relatively recent notion, and it might well have surprised Schumann. True, he did speak of the *Novelletten* as being 'closely connected', but it can't be claimed they're similar to the numbers of *Kreisleriana* or the *Davidsbündlertänze* or *Carnaval* in demanding to be listened to as cycles of original musical thought, with a power that



Joyful and boisterous: Naji Hakim, pictured at the organ of the Danish Broadcasting Corporation, makes a return to Signum Classics as 'organist composer'

drives the listener forwards from one number to the next.

For a start, the eight Novelletten make a much longer collection, taking nearly 48 minutes in the performance here. They're mostly in D major and exultant, even manic in mood, and that also counts against them when played complete there are no contrasting slower numbers. Marvellous stuff, especially the last one, but calling for stamina not only from the player. For the pianist they're a really tough call. The bravura writing has to be savoured, and there's a lot of it, as well as the unremitting rhythmic energy. And many of the pages are to be counted among Schumann's most inventively complex in their textural detail. Of the eight, only the first and the elaborate last one are often heard; Nos 4 and 5, a waltz and a polonaise respectively, hardly ever. So, lots of discoveries to be made. Danny Driver is commanding and personable. He never fails to establish character and to provide the understanding and flair of a virtuoso in leading us on, in getting from one thing to another. The only qualities I miss are a measure of ease with the continuity and greater differentiation in the sound and movement. There should be room, I think, for some freeing-up in this parade of

hyperactivity, and certainly for more acuteness in the projection of differing levels of forte sound. In his unsurpassed recording from way back, Dino Ciani (Brilliant, 6/11) encompassed all this, including the salient feature of No 6, one of Schumann's inspired pieces of continuous acceleration which Danny Driver misses by beginning it too fast. But he is faultless in his timing of what is perhaps the most inspired moment of all, the recall of a voice 'as if from afar' in the final piece - it comes twice, and it's Clara's, from a composition of hers. There are personages here and maybe a wedding scene is in progress, but everyone stops to listen; and you hold your breath.

The *Nachtstücke* are good, if a shade unimaginative in No 1 where the tread of the march seems to me to need subtlety of inflection, in the contrasting episodes particularly. This cycle inhabits a world not just of darkness but of fantasy and makebelieve (try Emil Gilels, if you can find him). You may not agree with my final cavil which concerns a Potton Hall recording that is skewed towards the middle and bass registers – not that you miss richness in the treble much because Schumann's piano music is 'middly' anyway and he doesn't

exploit it. But I sense a less than ideal recorded balance nevertheless.

Stephen Plaistow

#### **Ullmann**

'The Complete Works for Solo Piano' Seven Piano Sonatas. Variations and Double Fugue on a Theme by Schoenberg, Op 3a **Christophe Sirodeau** pf BIS (P) BIS2116 (125' • DDD)



It's ironic how a composer like Viktor Ullmann, who was persecuted and killed

by the Nazis, wrote seven piano sonatas (the last three composed in the Terezín concentration camp) that fully embrace German keyboard music's rich traditions. First movements employ strict sonata forms, while other movements consist of variation sets and fugues. The First Sonata contains a funeral march in Mahler's memory that pushes the older composer's forward-looking tonality even further. Yet one can also infer more than a tinge of Prokofiev in the Second Sonata's marchlike finale and the motoric rhythms of the Fourth Sonata's *Allegro vivace*.

Christophe Sirodeau is the third pianist to record all seven Ullmann sonatas and his interpretations generally differ from his cyclical predecessors Jeanne Golan (Steinway & Sons) and Konrad Richter (Bayer). His virtuosity is more vital than Golan's in the First Sonata's opening movement, yet the latter's finale proves more textually scrupulous in contrast to Sirodeau's fanciful nuances. He projects the Second Sonata's variation movement's inner voices to greater effect than in Golan's steadier reading, although Richter offers clearer balances between melody and accompaniment. Neither Sirodeau nor Golan match Richter's firmly upbeat tempo and attention to dynamic markings in the Fifth's fugal finale, although Sirodeau's contrapuntal control and decisive trills surpass Golan's softer-grained pianism here. Sirodeau is steadier than Golan in the Sixth's fourth movement but Golan makes more of an attempt to articulate the soft staccatos. Here, however, Richter's slower tempo allows the syncopated phrases to truly register. In the Seventh's hefty lastmovement fugue, Richter bests his colleagues for linear clarity but Sirodeau's sustaining power holds equal interest, as well as Golan's close observance of Ullmann's martellato sempre directive.

Sirodeau includes the piano version of Ullmann's *Variations and Double Fugue on a Theme by Schoenberg* for strings and his ardent, commanding performance may well tip the Ullmann cycle scales in his favour. Sonically speaking, BIS's resonant brightness contrasts with Steinway's close-up warmth. A worthwhile release; but Richter's more consistent artistry and pianistic finish remain reference points.

#### Jed Distler

Cpte Pf Sons – comparative versions: Golan (12/12) (STEI) STNS30014 K Richter (BAYE) BR100113/14

#### 'After a Reading of...Liszt!'

**Chopin** Etudes, Op 10 **Liszt** Ballade No 2, S171. Ernani: Paraphrase de concert, S532 **Lyapunov** Elégie en memoire de Franz Liszt, Op 11 No 12 **Piana** Après une lecture de Liszt

**Antonio Pompa-Baldi** pf

Two Pianists (F) TP1039305 (72' • DDD)



Liszt could hardly have received a more sumptuous or ingenious tribute than

that offered by Antonio Pompa-Baldi. Opening with the last of Lyapunov's 12 *Transcendental Etudes* ('Elégie en memoire de Franz Liszt), he continues with Chopin's Op 10 Etudes, dedicated to Liszt, original Liszt in the B minor Ballade and Liszt as master of the operatic paraphrase in Verdi's *Ernani*, and ends with Roberto Piana's *Après une lecture de Liszt*, dedicated to Pompa-Baldi and now receiving its first recording.

In the Lyapunov, a massive Hungarian Rhapsody though one with a Balakirevinfluenced Russian twist, the playing is of a thunderous aplomb. There is grandeur, too, in the Chopin Etudes, notably in No 1, most dazzling of curtain-raisers and a reworking of Bach's First Prelude; in the near-Wagnerian malaise of No 6, where the pianist's rubato is sufficiently bold and intense to tug at the heart-strings; and in the 'Revolutionary' Etude, where his outsize command comes into its own. You may miss something of, say, Ashkenazy's mercurial and poetic flight in his early recording or Pollini's crystalline perfection (again, in his first recording), but there is no denying Pompa-Baldi's formidable power and eloquence.

He is once more in his element in the storming rhetoric of Liszt's Second Ballade and *Ernani* Paraphrase before ending with a truly astonishing acknowledgement of Liszt's genius by an Italian composer born in 1971. The ghosts of the First Concerto, the B minor Sonata, the *Dante* Sonata, *Feux follets* and many other sources of inspiration flit in and out of its demonic textures. And here Pompa-Baldi's playing will send shivers down the spine of even the most ardent lover of virtuosity and high-octane rhetoric. Pianists should take note, though I doubt whether many will come within distance of a truly blistering attack.

#### Bryce Morrison 'Dumka'

Balakirev Dumka Dvořák Dumka and Furiant, Op 12 B136-37. Dumka, Op 35 B64 Liszt Glanes de Woronice, S249b - No 3, Complainte (Dumka) Lysenko Dumka-Shumka, Op 18 Martinů Three Dumkas Suk Dumka, Op 7 No 5 Tchaikovsky Dumka (Russian Rustic Scene), Op 59 Valešová Improvisation on Czech and Slovak Folk Songs Lada Valešová pf

Avie (F) AV2288 (59' • DDD)



A varied and sensitively planned programme, based on a genre that is in itself

full of contrasts, slow against fast, melancholy warmed by occasional sunlight. Lada Valešová commands a full, rounded tone but passes on facile virtuosity in favour of something mellower. In Tchaikovsky's Dumka, for example, where the temptation to indulge temple-throbbing histrionics at around the midway point (something Horowitz did so magnificently) is avoided: a sense of elegy predominates more or less for the duration, which isn't to say that the performance lacks brilliance. Of Dvořák's two Dumkas, the first opens with Bachian simplicity, whereas the Second, Op 12, is especially beautiful, the ensuing Furiant as pianistically interesting as any of Dvořák's solo keyboard works. Attractive pieces by Josef Suk, Mily Balakirev (in D minor and E minor respectively) and Liszt, his Glanes de Woronice No 3, 'Complainte', more thoughtful than virtuoso, are rather like sombre nocturnes. And there's Dumka-Shumka, Op 18, by the Ukrainian ethnographer Mykola Lysenko (1842-1912), easily the most exotic- (ie 'eastern') sounding piece on the disc, a formal equivalent of the sort of music cooked up among the Romanian gypsies (the violinist Grigoraș Dinicu made some wonderful records of similar repertoire).

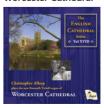
Three 'mini' Dumkas by Martinů act as charming palate-cleansers but perhaps the loveliest moment is left until last, Lada Valešová's own *Improvisation on Czech and Slovak Folk Songs*. Do any readers recall a treasurable series of 78s of Czech folk songs that Jarmila Novotná made in collaboration with the Czech diplomat and politician Jan Masaryk? Similar effect here, with just a hint of Grainger added. The perfect ending to a delightful programme. **Rob Cowan** 

#### 'The English Cathedral Series, Vol 18: Worcester'

Alain Deux Fantaisies Bonnet In memoriam Titanic, Op 10 No 1 Bridge Three Pieces for Organ - Minuet Debussy Deuxième Arabesque H Distler Four Spielstücke für die Kleinorgel, Op 18 D Hunt Tomkins' Trifle Mathias Toccata giocosa Shostakovich Festive Overture, Op 96. Katerina Izmailova - Passacaglia Somervell Air in C Tournemire Improvisation sur le Te Deum Vierne Feux follets, Op 53 No 4

Christopher Allsop org

Regent (©) REGCD449 (71' • DDD)
Played on the Kenneth Tickell organ of
Worcester Cathedral



When Christopher Robinson displayed the 1896 Hope-Jones organ of Worcester

Cathedral in his 1968 recording for HMV's 'Great Cathedral Organ' series (3/68), he chose a programme of Bach, Mendelssohn, Franck, Flor Peeters and William Mathias.

Organist, organ, record label and programme have all changed but, interestingly, one of the composers remains; and while Mathias's *Toccata giocosa* is a very different work from his extended *Partita* on the old LP, its crisp, terse and bright textures vividly demonstrate the special qualities of the very different organ which Worcester Cathedral now boasts.

Built in 2008 by Kenneth Tickell, it is roughly the same size as its predecessor but makes a very different sound. While it clearly handles French music well - after all, five of the 12 composers represented on this new disc are French – some of its most arresting sounds come from its softer stops, as revealed in Somervell's gentle Air and Bridge's enchanting Minuet. It also proves itself to be disarmingly nimble and fleetfooted (as does Allsop himself) in the one piece which celebrates the cathedral itself, combining the work of two previous organists, Donald Hunt (1976-96) and Thomas Tomkins (1596-1656), in the former's Tomkins' Trifle.

Both organ and organist reveal their finest qualities in the two Shostakovich pieces. The huge dynamic range of the famous Passacaglia is splendidly captured by the excellent Regent recording, while Allsop's own transcription of the *Festive Overture* combines impressive virtuosity with a richly colourful and at times brilliant organ sound. Marc Rochester

#### 'Latin American Guitar Favourites'

Barrios Mangoré La Catedral - Preludio. Julia Florida (Barcarola). Una limosna por el amor de Dios (La última canción). Prelude in C minor. Villancico de Navidad L Brouwer Dos Aires populares cubanos - Guajira Criolla; Zapateado. Dos Temas populares cubanos - Berceuse; Ojos brujos Cardoso Milonga Villa-Lobos Cinq Préludes

Warren Nicholson gtr

Warren Nicholson (F) 829982 144041 (49' • DDD)



The Paraguayan Barrios (he added Mangoré later in life) and Brazilian

Villa-Lobos were close contemporaries (born in 1885 and 1887 respectively) yet as composers were quintessentially different. Barrios was well schooled as a virtuoso and composer, for whom Chopin was a model, whereas Villa-Lobos was self-taught, and his Five Preludes (1940) became one of the most well-known pieces written for guitar. Few of Barrios's pieces have enjoyed quite the same advocacy; the five given here are

late pieces, composed between 1938 and his death in 1944, including the 'Preludio' to the renowned *La Catedral*, the other sections of which were written in 1914.

Like Barrios, the Cuban Leo Brouwer (*b*1939) is a formidable performer and no mean composer either, though of a more radical cast of mind. The four pieces played separately on the disc are from two pairs of pieces on popular Cuban melodies (1972, 1978), interleaved to make an effective super-suite. The Argentinian Jorge Cardoso (*b*1949) is younger still, another composer-guitarist with hundreds of works for the instrument – and a teaching method – to his credit. His *Milonga* (from *24 South American Pieces*, 1976) is not didactic but a charming reworking of a 19th-century song.

I had not encountered Warren Nicholson before this privately produced disc (downloadable from iTunes) landed on my mat. He is an accomplished player with a fine *legato* and enviable control of phrasing, interpretation and personality. There is little sensational (in the worst sense) in his playing, the music presented in a straightforward, stylistically honest programme. Nicholson may not be Miloš, perhaps, but one could do much worse than investigate these performances. **Guy Rickards** 

#### 'Vienne et après...'

Lachenmann Echo Andante
Neuwirth Marsyas
Pintscher On a Clear Day
Schoenberg Fünf Klavierstücke, Op 23
Stockhausen Klavierstück XIV
W Zimmermann Wüstenwanderung
Andrew Zhou pf
Tessitures (F) TESOO2 (75' • DDD)

#### 'Vienne et après...'

Ablinger Voices and Piano
Henze Lucy Escott Variations
Rihm Klavierstück No 5 (Tombeau)
Stockhausen Klavierstück IX
Webern Variations, Op 27
Widmann Elf Humoresken
Christopher Guzman pf
Tessitures (F) TESOO1 (67' • DDD)





Two discs sharing the same title by two American pianists who investigate the evolution of Austro-German modern composition since the 1950s, the decade during which Arnold Schoenberg died





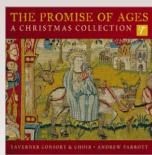
#### The Promise of Ages: A Christmas Collection

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Vaughan Williams • Weir **Andrew Parrott** 

Taverner Consort & Choir

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Gonzalo X. Ruiz, oboes Portland Baroque Orchestra Monica Huggett, violin & director

Stunning performances by period-instrument oboist extraordinaire Gonzalo X. Ruiz, of his own reconstructions from keyboard concertos by J. S. Bach



#### Beethoven The Middle String Quartets,

Opp. 59, 74 & 95

Cypress String Quartet

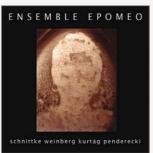
Clear-toned and deeply expressive readings of Beethoven's three "Rasumovsky" string quartets, the "Serioso" and the "Harp", by this "most impressive" (Stereophile) young American quartet



#### String Trios by Kurtág, Penderecki, Schnittke, Weinberg

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\*\*\*\* \* The Daily Telegraph

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Leonard Elschenbroich, Alexei Grynyuk, Petr Limonov, Netherlands PO, Andrew Litton

Praise for Rachmaninov & Shostakovich Sonatas

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and Karlheinz Stockhausen created his first compositions.

Schoenberg's Fünf Klavierstücke, Op 23, and Webern's Variations, Op 27, are air from another planet still, their rhythmic free-flow and harmonic conundrums defying gravity. Andrew Zhou's view of the Schoenberg eschews any residual hints of Romanticism. Rubato is crushed, the mood is über-sober. Christopher Guzman breathes more light and air through Webern's Variations, the first movement circling like a fragile mechanism and the third finding dramatic purpose within Webern's fragments of melodic utterance. Both pianists also offer up a Stockhausen Klavierstück, although neither pianist gives the likes of Aloys Kontarsky or Steffen Schleiermacher anything much to worry about. Zhou's XIV feels soft-centred, while Guzman's take on IX is curiously underpowered and underwhelming.

Hans Werner Henze's Lucy Escott Variations (1963) bridge old and new Vienna. And the tired tonal doodling of Matthias Pintscher's On a Clear Day (2004) and Jörg Widmann's Elf Humoresken (2007), and especially the Messiaenwith-water cop out of Olga Neuwirth's noticeably lame Marsyas (2004), makes you appreciate Henze's old-school compositional acumen: patterns finding form through their development and finessing. Helmut Lachenmann's Echo Andante (1962), Walter Zimmermann's Wüstenwanderung (1986) and Wolfgang Rihm's Klavierstück No 5 (Tombeau) (1975) cover the Viennese stylistic waterfront, the scorched-earth rubble of the Lachenmann awakening our senses for Zimmermann's reclaimed tonality.

Which leaves Peter Ablinger's unique *Voices and Piano* – extracted from a larger ongoing cycle where pitch material is derived from the speech patterns of voice recordings (here we hear the pieces inspired by Borges, Schoenberg and proto-12-tone composer Josef Matthias Hauer) – to remind us of the increasingly fertile overlap between music and sound art.

Philip Clark

#### 'Wagner Without Words'

Wagner Fantasy, Op 3 WWV22. Albumblatt für Ernst Benedikt Kietz - Song Without Words. Zurich Waltzes, WWV88. In das Album der Fürstin M, WWV94. Sonata for the Book of Mrs MW, WWV85. Albumblatt for Mrs Betty Schott, WWV108 Wagner/Liszt Tannhäuser - Entry of the Guests, S445/1a. Der fliegende Holländer - Spinning Chorus, S440. Lohengrin - Elsa's Bridal Procession, S445/2. Tristan und Isolde - Liebestod, S447. Rienzi - Santo spirito cavaliere,

S439. Das Rheingold - Walhall, S449

Wagner/Williams Scenes from Parsifal

Wagner/Gould/Williams Götterdämmerung Siegfried's Rhine Journey. Die Meistersinger
von Nürnberg - Prelude

Liŷr Williams pf

Signum (M) (2) SIGCD388 (143' • DDD)



Wagner's operas have inspired innumerable piano transcriptions from Carl Tausig to

Zoltán Kocsis but those to which pianists most frequently turn are by Liszt. To the half dozen of these Llŷr Williams has selected, he adds three more: his own arrangements of Glenn Gould's Siegfried's Rhine Journey and Prelude to Die *Meistersinger* transcriptions as well as his own version of three scenes from Parsifal. It makes for a varied and rewarding programme enriched by Williams's velvet touch, meticulous voicing, attention to detail and judiciously graded dynamics. For me, he is at his best in the music from Parsifal (his transcription of the Good Friday Music is not dissimilar to that by Joseph Rubinstein), quite beautifully realised, as is the spaciously phrased Liebestod and the less familiar (but no less powerful) 'Santo spirito cavaliere' from Rienzi. What I miss in Williams's playing is that last ounce of tension and sense of mounting excitement (Entry of the Guests and Die Meistersinger). Here and in his delivery of the Spinning Chorus (compare with the carefree Paderewski on his famous 1924 recording), accuracy and caution do not take him far enough beyond the printed page.

Williams punctuates the transcriptions with some of Wagner's original piano works (he admits that he learnt of their existence, surprisingly, only last year). If you too are one of those unaware that the Sorcerer of Bayreuth wrote anything for piano then you haven't missed anything. The interminable (26'01") Fantasy, Op 3, written as a 19-year-old, dribbles along with bits of second-hand Bach, Weber and Mendelssohn popping up here and there, underpinned by a portentous Beethovenian solemnity. Stephan Möller in his 1992 recording (Koch, 6/93) takes a livelier view of this, though cannot compete with Williams's tonal finesse. The five other mercifully shorter works, no more than period curios, confirm the wisdom of Wagner's decision to leave piano composition and transcriptions to his father-in-law.

Jeremy Nicholas

### IN THE STUDIC

## An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

#### · New York Nielsen

Alan Gilbert and his **New York Philharmonic** have completed their recordings of the Nielsen symphonies for Dacapo. In October they recorded the Fifth and Sixth Symphonies at Avery Fisher Hall, and the self-styled 'Nielsen Project' will be completed in February next year when the Clarinet Concerto is recorded by the New York Phil's incoming Principal Clarinet, Anthony McGill. Dacapo will release both discs next year.

#### Silvestrov Sonatas

Simon Smith has recorded a series of piano works by the Ukrainian pianist and postmodernist composer Valentin Silvestrov. Smith, a contemporary music specialist who has previously recorded James MacMillan's piano works, will include Silvestrov's three completed sonatas for piano. Delphian will issue the disc next June.

#### · Petrenko's Elgar

Onyx has captured **Vasily Petrenko**'s acclaimed performances of Edward Elgar's two symphonies with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra. The recordings, made at Philharmonic Hall in Liverpool, will be released in early 2015.

#### · Beethoven cycle from the Elias

'Every respectable label needs a Beethoven quartet cycle,' said Wigmore Hall's John Gilhooly in September as he announced that the **Elias Quartet**'s performances of the Beethoven string quartets, as performed at Wigmore Hall, will appear on its own label. Watch out for the first disc later this year.



Tritschler's Wigmore recital
 Also on Wigmore Hall Live, Irish tenor

 Robin Tritschler's recital from earlier
 this year, coupling songs by Britten and
 Schubert, will be released in 2015, and
 there will be more from the singer.

## James Dillon

Embraced by the Proms and showered with awards, here is an enigmatic composer who stands apart, writes Philip Clark

ames Dillon said nothing publically during the recent debate about Scottish independence, partly you suspect because the wider media weren't interested in soliciting the views of a composer who writes music that obstinately refuses to dance to the mainstream tune – but also because the Glasgow-born Dillon has long lived his life in a state of devo-max from the UK.

In interviews he breaks for the borders. Sir Harrison Birtwistle writes aurally uninteresting music, he says. Sir Peter Maxwell Davies's haggis-and-tartan sentimentality makes him want to puke. And interviewers quickly learn the futility of quizzing him about the domesticated new music of Colin Matthews, Mark-Anthony Turnage and Sally Beamish. Milton Babbitt yes, Elliott Carter maybe, John Adams - who? The historical points of reference that count for Dillon are Iannis Xenakis, Olivier Messiaen, Edgard Varèse and Karlheinz Stockhausen; his fastidiously scored compositions might look on the page like a conscious attempt to ape the classic-period New Complexity Gold of Michael Finnissy and Brian Ferneyhough, but other compositional priorities and strategies are clearly at work. If Ferneyhough is the anchor back at the newsroom - clean desk, giving a neat run-down of rolling post-Schoenbergian news - Dillon is like the gonzo reporter who works the field, connecting unlikely pieces of information, moving the story on.

# Dillon stirs the cauldron. Slowly and deliberately. Purposefully casting a spell, wonderworking the elements into action'

Dillon is Composer-in-Residence at this year's Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (November 21-30, hcmf.co.uk), an institution that has remained steadfastly loyal to his work. The first time I heard Dillon's compositions in the flesh was in Huddersfield during the early 1990s when the brute carnality and deep beauty of pieces like Come live with me, black/nebulae and East 11th St NY 10003 put clear aesthetic water between him and other featured British composers. And then there was the man himself, a very specific enigma. With his coils of jet-black hair, carefully cultivated moustache and penchant for dressing with just a hint of gothic chic, his image pitched up somewhere between Billy Connolly and Guy Fawkes. Quietly spoken and reticent, Dillon preferred to dissolve into the background as his music blared centre stage.

Music that consciously allies itself to the late 1950s/ early 1960s modernist project can be as retro and quaint as the vision of the future proffered by *Thunderbirds*. Neo-Modernist scores no longer provoke – they pose, their composers indulging in posturing, the rehashed mantras of Stockhausen or the founding fathers of Dutch power minimalism.

But Dillon's devolved independence licenses him to look beyond the usual ideological allegiances. His profile has always been high, his success giving him access to arenas that have remained stubbornly closed to most composers of his modernist instincts. He's been a regular at the BBC Proms, a four-time winner at the Royal Philharmonic Society Music Awards and then, in 2010, the big one - the BBC Singers, BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and Les Percussions de Strasbourg mounted the first complete performance of his threeand-an-half-hour cycle of instrumental and choral works with electronics. Nine Rivers. This outsider knows how to sneak back inside.

Nine Rivers reaches beyond an everyday understanding of 'music' to create a sound

environment like no other. The idea of a river becomes a metaphor for the flow of time, with currents of memory overlapping or rippling in new directions. Dillon draws on Heraclitus and Rimbaud – both of them elucidating their notions of flux and transformation of time using the symbolism of rivers. The tide turns when electronics, at the midpoint of the cycle, puncture the acoustic sound world, flooding the music with fresh possibility. Neo-modernism can be cool and calculated, rigid and rebarbative, but the music of *Nine Rivers* is hot, volatile and stylistically impulsive – it is *felt*.

The early 1980s found Dillon holed up in Cornwall, living in a commune, an existence he admits that was fuelled by excesses of drug taking. His passion for rock music led him to discover Varèse's name listed on the back of Frank Zappa's 1966 album *Freak Out!* as an influence and, having moved to London, he found himself at the Roundhouse in Camden listening to The Rolling Stones and The Doors – and later Pierre Boulez conducting modern composition masterworks by Ligeti, Stockhausen and Kagel.

For young, media-savvy composers to claim allegiances to rock and punk is de rigueur. You will have noticed how an implausibly large number of one-time punks wind up studying with Robin Holloway or George Benjamin. But Dillon clearly understands the sonic motivations behind plugged-in rock. He played in bands himself, and his composed music has

#### **DILLON FACTS**

Born Glasgow, October 29, 1950
Education Art and Design
at Glasgow University, the
music of North India at
the University of Keele.
Self-taught as a composer.
Career He has taught at
Darmstadt and is currently
professor of composition at
the University of Minnesota
in Minneapolis.

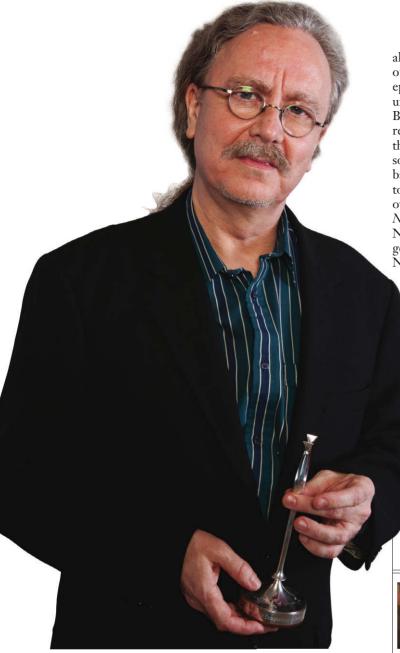
#### **Breakthrough work**

Helle Nacht (1986-87), first performed at Musica Nova, Glasgow, in September 1987

#### Definitive work

Nine Rivers (1982-2000) On Dillon's spontaneity - an ear for the sensual impact of instrumental sound, an utter disregard for the academic rules of symphonic development - gives the music an organic, breathing quality.' (Ben Watson, music writer) Dillon on Dillon 'My music is all about transformation over time. The whole idea of this cycle [Nine Rivers] is that you immerse yourself in these rivers where things appear and disappear and reappear later in a transformed way. In the final piece they're merged when they all flow into the mythical

Oceanos of the Greeks.'



'This outsider knows how to sneak back inside': Dillon wins a Royal Philharmonic Society Award for Nine Rivers in 2011

an enveloping, hedonistic, brawny physicality that rhymes convincingly with these roots.

Like Xenakis, Dillon's music obeys no rules but its own. Wild invention is held to account by cool process; keen ears for harmonic displacement and registeral colour operate hand in hand with conceptual rationality. Dillon is an autodidact. He studied linguistics, acoustics, art and mathematics – but not composition. And his music stands as a warning that composers can often wear their learning too heavily. Carefully plotted routine overriding discovery. Technique abused as a get-out-of-jail-free card. Which is never the Dillon way.

The pieces that made his name – the orchestral *Helle Nacht* (1986-87) and *ignis noster* (1991-92) and his 1991 Second String Quartet – share a continuity of expressive purpose with the more recent *Philomela* (2004), *New York Triptych* (2011-12), and Seventh String Quartet (2013). Dillon stirs the cauldron. Slowly and deliberately in the case of his early music. Purposefully casting a spell, wonderworking the elements into action.

Dillon's compositions have often incited descriptions of

alchemy and divination, music that reaches inside the poetry of the earth. But, nearing the end of *Helle Nacht*, an epigrammatic tonal chorale rises out of the orchestral undergrowth. The context is striking. Is this a reference to Bach, Dowland or Robert Carver? Ultimately, though, the realisation dawns that the source is unimportant. Because in the midst of this trippy, celestial music Dillon has implanted some ancient runes – a moment that takes us from the cosmic back to the human, from the future-science of harmony to sequences of notes which have sustained their identity over many centuries. Like much of Dillon's later music, *New York Triptych* – scored for the eight musicians of the NYC-based Tacet Ensemble – breaks the continuum as it is generated. The cauldron is stirred, then allowed to simmer. New ingredients are thrown in. The potion reacts to the new

chemistry: sounds spill everywhere, the structure ruptures. Environmental chatter and incidental sounds cued in via a radio and CD player tell, like *Helle Nacht*'s chorale, of a world outside this piece – and indeed outside of music itself.

When it was announced that he was working on his first opera, the prospect seemed implausible. But typically Dillon defined his own terms. He called it music/théâtre, symbolically placing his piece somewhere between French Baroque Opera – Lully, Rameau – and the ritual of Japanese Noh theatre. *Philomela* is plotted around the story of the Princess of Athens who returns to earth as a nightingale after being raped and murdered by her sister's husband. Dillon carries the story forward through active musical drama that never sinks to the level of background atmosphere propping up word setting. The story moving on – literally. **6** 

#### DILLON ON DISC

Three recordings that show the range of Dillon's invention



#### Chamber works

String Quartet No 2, Traumwerk. Vernal Showers Arditti Quartet, Nieuw Ensemble / Ed Spanjaard Naïve Montaigne (M) (D+) MO782046 (11/01)

Dillon's Second String Quartet compresses all his obsessions inside a slender structure: crushed melodic debris detonating and fizzling out. *Traumwerk* is an inventive set of miniatures for two violins; *Vernal Showers* an opulent landscape study.



#### The Book of Elements

Noriko Kawai pf

NMC (M) (2) NMCD091 (9/04)

Every Dillon composition is, one could say, a book of elements. But his mammoth

solo piano cycle, written between 1996 and 2003, plays with ideas of transformational energy – bold gestures are pushed towards collapse, mechanisms accrue layers, the final paragraph explodes material into a black hole.





Soloists, Remix Ensemble / Jurjen Hempel Aeon © ② AECDO986 (1/10)

Dillon's opera follows in a lineage that would include Britten's *The Rape of Lucretia* and

Birtwistle's *Punch and Judy*. The music has ritualistic grandeur; but there's room within its modernist sound world for nods towards Baroque formality and stylisation.

# Vocal



## Richard Wigmore listens to a Creation live from Bavaria:

'In the first sunrise Haitink conjures a magnificent fullness and depth of sonority from his players' ► REVIEW ON PAGE 72



## Geoffrey Norris on Russian song from Dmitri Hvorostovsky:

'He finds the spontaneity of phrasing and the subtle inflections of joy and sadness that these narratives embrace' > REVIEW ON PAGE 77

#### JS Bach



Mass in B minor, BWV232

Lydia Teuscher, Ida Falk Winland sops Tim Mead counterten Samuel Boden ten Neal Davies bass

Arcangelo / Jonathan Cohen

Hyperion (F) (2) CDA68051/2 (115' • DDD • T/t)



With major Bach vocal works now appearing on Hyperion, notably under Stephen Layton,

the absence of an à la mode Mass in B minor had left an obvious gap for one of our most 'completist' of major record companies, not least because their last and only recording – Robert King's 1996 recording with the wayward Tolzers – was only a qualified success and has not worn particularly well.

Jonathan Cohen's rejection of the generic, within a grand and ravishing overview, is what propels an overwhelming sense here that this reading deserves to be taken very seriously. Quite how in performance one 'reads' the span of a piece whose spiritual and intellectual symmetries are potentially so forbidding raises many issues but Cohen's unforced feel for tactus, initially heard in the prima prattica (the more archaic) movements is revelatory in its coherence: witness the way the second 'Kyrie' arches with natural fluidity in a kind of liturgical knowingness. The same can be said, right at the close, in a 'Dona nobis pacem' which glows with a broad, valedictory affirmation that Karl Richter would have relished.

If, over the years, one can identify accounts with particular 'corporate' identities – the strong instrumental balance in Frans Brüggen's first version (Philips) or the homogeneous priorities of each of Herreweghe's three readings – the most distinctive attribute here is how Cohen, with his exceptional choral and instrumental forces, resists pursuing a single overall textural ideal and instead seeks an evolving, unrushed relationship between each movement according to the

musical stage in the journey. For example, the way the *Gloria* is deliberately 'placed' between an assuaging *Kyrie* and a ritualistic view of the *Credo*, as a public showpiece, allowing the large Mass groupings to find their own special personality and space without losing the grip, character or definition of each movement within.

How solo movements work as 'micro-climates' within each part of the Ordinary of the Mass, and especially within the totality of Bach's set-piece choral frame, requires yet further directorial perceptiveness and the results here are rarely less than deeply compelling. If the first duet takes a while to settle, the Dresden-inspired 'Laudamus te' takes flight with radiance in the hands of the excellent Ida Falk Winland, and the geniality of the 'Domine Deus' sets up the 'Qui tollis' with an uncannily atmospheric gear shift.

Arcangelo's forces are not dissimilar to those of many leading mid-size 'period' ensembles and yet one of the over-riding attributes of this recording - in a church (Tetbury) which cannot quite deliver equal focus in all ensemble configurations – is how each musical invention is viewed as an exegesis to be graciously uncovered, often starting with chamber-like principles. Cohen often does so with a kind of continental galanterie and coloration, as in the 'Patrem omnipotentem', the concentrated luminosity of the 'Crucifixus' and 'Confiteor', and in Neal Davies's 'Et in Spiritum Sanctum' and Samuel Boden's 'Benedictus', both exhibiting a touchingly consorting sense of mutual belonging between voice and instrument.

This is a performance where character and rich dimension emerge from within a patient and naturally projected vision of Bach's most celebrated compendium. The work infrequently speaks with such gracefulness, freedom or conviction.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

#### JS Bach



St John Passion, BWV245

Mark Padmore ten Evangelist Roderick Williams

bass Christus **Camilla Tilling** sop **Magdalena Kožená** mez **Topi Lehtipuu** ten **Christian Gerhaher** bass **Berlin Radio Choir; Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra** / **Sir Simon Rattle** 

Stage director Peter Sellars

Video directors Daniel Finkernagel, Alexander Lück Berliner Philharmoniker Recordings ⑤ ③ (two ஊ + ≦) BPHR140031 (135' + 52' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonuses: Introduction by Simon Halsey; Sir Simon Rattle and Peter Sellars in conversation Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, February & March 2014



The idea of faith merits not a single mention in almost an an hour of spoken

material ancillary to this luxuriously packaged set. Indeed, more than any of Peter Sellars's previous dramatic engagements with Bach - not only the St Matthew Passion but solo cantatas with Lorraine Hunt Lieberson - his ritualisation brings an urgent sense of the present to John's magnificently abstract gospel narrative, and that sense of the present hardly swerves from its focus on doubt, cruelty and the impossibility of peace. Central to Sellars's concept is not Christus or the Evangelist but the consciencestricken figure of Pilate, onstage almost throughout. 'Who killed Jesus?' asked the programme note of a Good Friday performance I once attended in Coventry Cathedral. 'We did.'

Those who are comfortable with the historicist credentials of Brüggen and Kuijken, or the certainties of Richter – in the filmed version, radiating a concentrated power all its own – may feel reluctant to explore, with Sellars and Rattle, the depth of suffering experienced by, in particular, the Evangelist and Christus, no less than the disordered collective mentality of the chorus as they switch from anti-Semitic mob to guilt-ridden penitents. Turning off the screen won't do, either, because the

expressive risks taken all round push singers and instrumentalists to extremes of expression located specifically within their dramatic context. On its own terms – and how else should we take it? – the performance makes for the kind of compulsive but almost unwatchable experience familiar from Zimmermann's *Die Soldaten* and the films of Michael Haneke, godless works of art if ever there were such.

The rough tone and choppy phrasing of Topi Lehtipuu in 'Erwäge' would not do in ecclesiastical or studio settings but it works as a meditation on Christ's scourging, directly following the weary, ambivalent legato of 'Betrachte, meine Seel' sung by Christian Gerhaher as Pilate. The declamatory hysteria of Magdalena Kožená in 'Es ist vollbracht' stands at a polar distance from the composed resignation exemplified by Bernarda Fink on Sir John Eliot Gardiner's second recording (SDG, 6/11). Usually one of the few moments of light relief, the flute-led B flat major of 'Ich folge dir gleichfalls' is lent a shrill insistence by Camilla Tilling as she urges Pilate towards a kind of redemption in the arms of Roderick Williams's Christus.

These arias are underpinned by some exquisite obbligato contributions from members of the Berlin Philharmonic, who seem more ready to match the singers and colour the text than four years previously in their recording of the *St Matthew*. Leading the continuo is a busy lutenist, Björn Colell, above the still-characteristic Berlin bass sound. The sound production, especially on Blu-ray, places instrumentalists on equal footing with singers, even more so in the 5.1 surround mix. Peter Quantrill

#### **Borg**

Fifteen Songs to Poems by Gustaf Fröding<sup>a</sup>. Landscape: Twelve Poems by JP Jacobsen<sup>b</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Gitta-Maria Sjöberg sop <sup>a</sup>Mattias Nilsson bar

<sup>b</sup>University Choir Lille MUKO, Copenhagen /
Jesper Grove Jørgensen; <sup>a</sup>Nordic Chamber

Orchestra / Erik Jakobsson

Danacord © DACOCD748 (61' • DDD • T/t)



Matti Borg (*b*1956) has enjoyed a triple career as an operatic baritone, composer

and teacher. He graduated from Ib Nørholm's composition class at the Royal Danish Music Academy in 1983, followed by studies in London with Oliver Knussen. His singing career began in 1987 after studies with Kim Borg and Keld Thaarup in Copenhagen and with Nicolai Gedda in Sweden, where he made his operatic debut, with Norrlands Opera, in 1991.

As a composer, songs and vocal compositions dominate his output, the earliest dating from the early 1980s. On the evidence of the two cycles recorded here – one for two soloists and an octet of flute, clarinet, harp, string quartet and double bass, the other for *a cappella* chorus – his style is appealingly melodic, harmonically and expressively so Romantic in idiom that the innocent ear might assume its creator to have been born in 1856. If the style is not particularly original or individual, his lyrical gift is winning, the tunes often rather folk-like in atmosphere.

Both sets are exquisitely performed. Soprano Gitta-Maria Sjöberg (the composer's wife and a fellow pupil of Kim Borg) and baritone Mattias Nilsson make a superbly complementary couple, dividing the 15 songs between them (there are no duets). The Lille MUKO Choir delivers the choral cycle *Landscape* with skill and finesse. The booklet has many words – all the texts in Danish with English résumés, composer and performer biographies – but not one word about the works themselves. Danacord's sound is very fine. **Guy Rickards** 

#### **Debussy**

'Songs, Vol 3'

Musique<sup>a</sup>. Romance (Silence ineffable de l'heure)<sup>a</sup>. La romance d'Ariel<sup>a</sup>. Regret<sup>a</sup>. L'archet<sup>a</sup>. Chanson triste<sup>b</sup>. Les baisers d'amour<sup>b</sup>. Les Elfes<sup>a</sup>. Aimons-nous et dormons<sup>a</sup>. Souhait<sup>a</sup>. Sérénade<sup>a</sup>. Rêverie<sup>a</sup>. La Belle au bois dormant<sup>b</sup>. Il dort encore<sup>a</sup>. Les roses<sup>a</sup>. Pierrot<sup>a</sup>. Les baisers<sup>a</sup>. Dans le jardin<sup>b</sup>. Le lilas<sup>a</sup>. Caprice<sup>a</sup>. Zéphyr<sup>a</sup>. Fête galante<sup>a</sup>. Le promenoir des deux amants<sup>b</sup>. Paysage sentimental<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Jennifer France *sop* <sup>b</sup>Jonathan McGovern *bar* Malcolm Martineau *pf* 

Hyperion © CDA68016 (67' • DDD • T/t)



Having already earned plaudits for his first two volumes of Debussy songs (5/03,

6/12), Malcolm Martineau here partners the soprano Jennifer France and the baritone Jonathan McGovern for another 26 of them, focusing on a dozen to texts by Théodore de Banville and five to poems by Paul Bourget, together with a handful of miscellaneous ones and a group of four that were only recently rediscovered.

One inescapable factor is the impact that the soprano voice of Marie-Blanche Vasnier had on Debussy. Right at the start of this disc we have four of the Bourget songs that were among the ones in which he capitalised on Vasnier's capacity to explore the stratosphere - indeed the mesosphere – of the soprano range. In 'Musique', 'Silence ineffable de l'heure', 'La romance d'Ariel' and 'Regret', and then again in the Charles Cros setting 'L'archet', Jennifer France negotiates the upperaltitude territory both with accuracy and with sensitivity to the songs' moods, with smoothness of line matching her subtlety of vocal inflection. After these high-wire acrobatics, Jonathan McGovern shows himself to be thoroughly at home within the normal baritone register for the two Maurice Bouchor songs, 'Chanson triste' and 'Les baisers d'amour', lyrically astute, eloquently poised.

While most of the songs here are for soprano and are well chosen and varied within themselves, the placing of McGovern's seven for baritone provides pools of reflectiveness, adding to the impression that Martineau, whose pianism is a constant delight, has devised a proper recital programme rather than a completist survey. **Geoffrey Norris** 

#### **Elgar**

The Dream of Gerontius, Op 38a.

Sea Pictures, Op 37

Sarah Connolly mez aStuart Skelton ten
aDavid Soar bass BBC Symphony Chorus
and Orchestra / Sir Andrew Davis

Chandos © @ Sea CHSA5140 (125' • DDD/DSD • T)



This is unquestionably the strongest *Gerontius* to have come my way since Sir Mark Elder's

Gramophone Award-winning Hallé account (1/09). A superbly paced and lovingly shaped Prelude immediately proclaims Sir Andrew Davis's formidable credentials in this repertoire; indeed, his patient and scrupulously observant conception of the whole work evinces a selfless authority, wisdom and instinctive ebb and flow, and he certainly secures a splendidly disciplined and consistently fervent response from his massed BBC Symphony forces. Just occasionally I find myself craving a touch greater thrust – I personally prefer 'Sanctus fortis' to move on a fraction more than it does here, and perhaps the last ounce of exhilaration and edge-of-seat danger is missing from the Presto marking at fig 43 onwards (disc 2, tr 7) in the Demons' chorus – but these tiny quibbles pale into insignificance when set beside the ineluctable sweep and glowing dedication of Davis's reading in its entirety.

As for the vocal team, Stuart Skelton's stamina, dramatic range and ringing, Vickers-like tone are a tremendous asset. He may not yet be a match for Heddle Nash on Sir Malcolm Sargent's pioneering 1945 set (still the touchstone all these decades later), but he brings exactly the right awe-struck hush to 'Novissima hora est' and really shines in the oratorio's later stages. David Soar, too, sings with lofty projection and unstinting eloquence (his Angel of the Agony is an especially pleasing achievement). Arguably best of all, though, is Sarah Connolly, who brings a deeply affecting radiance, sense of wonder and intelligence to everything she does.

Disc 2 also contains a majestic performance of the Gerontius Prelude with its concert ending, while the main offering is preceded by a wholly sympathetic rendering of Sea Pictures, which (once again) finds Connolly in glorious voice. Davis and the BBC SO play their full part in a performance to rival such distinguished forebears as the Baker/Barbirolli (EMI), Greevy/Handley (CfP) and, yes, Connolly's own conspicuously fresh and rewarding interpretation with Simon Wright and the Bournemouth SO (Naxos, 12/06). Chandos's thrillingly tangible SACD sound packs an almighty punch in terms of lustre, amplitude and range (Croydon's Fairfield Hall was the helpful venue). Dare we look forward to The Kingdom and The Apostles from this same source? Andrew Achenbach

#### Frandsen

Requiem



Complete settings of the Requiem Mass by Scandinavian composers are few and

far between. Rarer still are those by Danes. The most celebrated, until the present day, was that completed in 1887 by the Berlioz protégé Asger Hamerik.

Now, over 130 years later, John Frandsen (*b*1956) has achieved a modern milestone with his own monumental setting, composed in 2010, which lasts over an hour and a half. This 'meditative invocation of eternal rest' is dedicated to the memory of the victims of the massacre on the island of Utøya in Norway on July 22, 2011, and this premiere recording was made shortly before and immediately

after the first performance, which took place on April 5, 2013.

Frandsen has marshalled his large choral and orchestral forces with a resolute mastery, clearly relishing the vivid imagery and word-painting opportunities. The Latin text has been expanded by the interpolation of six strophic hymns by the Danish writer Simon Grotrian (b1961), their intimate commentaries providing a striking contrast of simplicity. They are sung here by the Faroese rock singer Teitur Lassen, whose untrained, lightweight delivery is reminiscent of Sting's wheezy Dowland croonings. His occasionally tentative search for notes emphasises the sense of fragility in the vocal line. Fortunately he receives first-rate support from the organist Per Salo, whose accompaniments are written in a much more sophisticated style.

A cosmopolitan range of stylistic echoes and influences can be discerned. Thus there are touches of Britten in the 'Judex ergo' (tolling bells), with its overwhelming cries of 'salva me', Stravinsky's spikiest wind voicing in the 'Quarens me', and Tippett's gestural string-writing in the 'Lacrymosa'. The strings are also used to magical effect in the bass soloist's 'Qui Mariam absolvisti' with the added coolness of the marimba and harp. This movement and the filigree 'Communio' represent two of the most deeply felt moments in the work. Of the four soloists, the mezzosoprano Andrea Pellegrini and bass Halvor Melien share the laurels. The choruses are on spectacular form throughout, especially in the 'Dies irae' sections, which Frandsen treats as a demonic whirligig, complete with screams and ululations, all conjuring up a scene of violence and despair. The orchestra displays a wealth of fine soloists, including an idiosyncratic obbligato for the orchestral tuba in the 'Tuba mirum'. This eloquent statement deserves the widest circulation. Malcolm Riley

#### Gesualdo

Gesualdo Sacrarum cantionum liber primus Luzzaschi Ave maris stella De Macque Intrada d'organo Trabaci Consonanze stravaganti Odhecaton; Ensemble Mare Nostrum / Paolo Da Col with Lieuwe Tamminga org Ricercar (F) RIC343 (64' • DDD)



Those expecting the composer's trademark chromaticisms in his motets will be largely

disappointed, but these more conservative pieces dispel the idea that Gesualdo's

eccentricity was any mask for technical deficiency. This new recording of his first book of motets offers a very different perspective from the all-vocal version from Oxford Camerata and the more recent account of the second book from the Vocal Consort Berlin (Harmonia Mundi, 4/13). It corresponds more closely to the sort of performance conditions he might have expected: one or two voices to a part, a variety of instruments in different combinations either alongside or in place of voices, and assorted continuo instruments (though no organ). Some pieces are taken by a single top voice accompanied by instruments. This variety serves the programme well; but an especially welcome addition is the selection of organ pieces by Trabaci and the wonderful Giovanni de Macque, a musician whose influence appears increasingly out of proportion to his present obscurity: Lieuwe Tamminga's presence adds much to the attraction of this project.

The motets were recorded in Venosa itself, and its subdued acoustic imparts an intimate gloom that is charmingly appropriate. Yet greater bloom might have given the singers more to work with, for they seem almost inhibited (particularly the countertenors, whose rather strained tone tends to iron out the differences between vowels). That tentativeness, surprisingly, comes across at key moments when those chromaticisms are at last unleashed (as at 'Miserere mei' in Peccantem me quotidie). Were the musicians distracted by the Prince of Venosa's troubled spirit flitting about the place? I wonder. Fabrice Fitch Gesualdo - selected comparison:

Oxford Camerata, Summerly (NAXO) 8 550742

#### Haydn

Die Schöpfung

Camilla Tilling sop Mark Padmore ten

Hanno Müller-Brachmann bass-bar

Bavarian Radio Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Bernard Haitink

BR-Klassik © @ 900125 (101' • DDD • T/t) Recorded live at the Herkulessaal, Munich, December 19 & 20, 2013



Astonishingly, Haitink waited until he was 82 to conduct *The Creation* for the

first time. Yet his profound sympathy for Haydn's *opus summum* is everywhere evident in this live recording, taken from two Munich performances in 2013. Haitink is predictably superb in movements that encapsulate the 18th-century notion of 'the



John Frandsen (left), soloists and members of the Danish National Symphony Orchestra after the premiere of the composer's Requiem in Copenhagen on 5 April, 2013

sublime': in the opening evocation of Chaos, which combines a majestic breadth with a sense of infinite strangeness; in the hushed, awed chorus as God's spirit moves over the waters; or in the first sunrise, where Haitink conjures a magnificent fullness and depth of sonority from his Bavarian players. Rarely, too, has the portrayal of the first dawn in Paradise sounded so radiant, with seraphic playing from the trio of flutes.

With eager, firm-toned singing from the professional choir, the neo-Handelian fugal choruses unfold with a wide dynamic range and a powerful sense of inevitability. Haitink's tempi – say, in the trio and chorus 'Der Herr ist gross' – are often on the smart side but never feel hard-driven. A word, too, for the witty fortepiano continuo, whose creative touches include a delightful suggestion of angelic harps in the recitative before the trio 'In holder Anmut steh'n'.

As in so many *Creation* recordings, reservations centre on the soloists. Slightly strained in her opening 'Mit Staunen sieht das Wunderwerk', Camilla Tilling settles down for her two solo arias, sung with smiling, vernal tone and an evident pleasure in the words. Mark Padmore, thoughtful and involving as ever, sounds a

touch over-forceful in 'Nun schwanden vor dem heiligen Strahlen' – the first lyrical music in the oratorio – but catches all the mystery of the moonrise, and the tenderness of Haydn's depiction of Eve. Hanno Müller-Brachmann begins well, with a hushed, veiled 'Im Anfange schuf Gott', and palpably enjoys his zoological narration in Part 2. In his two arias, and his duets with Eve, he tends to bluster like a basso buffo, with biffed high notes and scant regard for a sustained line.

This new recording has much to offer, above all Haitink's noble and exhilarating direction. But for an often similarly conceived performance in German, my vote would go to Colin Davis on LSO Live, for his more consistent solo team, and for playing of even more character and colour that includes a dash of *echt* Haydnesque fun.

#### Richard Wigmore

Selected comparison: LSO, C Davis (9/09) (LSO) LSO0628

#### Howells

Stabat mater<sup>a</sup>. Te Deum. Sine nomine<sup>b</sup>

Alison Hill sop abBenjamin Hulett ten

The Bach Choir; Bournemouth Symphony
Orchestra / David Hill

Naxos ® 8 573176 (70' • DDD • T/t)



It is now 20 years since Howells's substantial setting of the *Stabat* mater was recorded by

Gennadi Rozhdestvensky and the LSO on Chandos. A work deeply imbued by the composer's grief at the loss of his son from polio, its first performance dates from 1965, 15 years after the premiere of its other cathartic counterpart, Hymnus Paradisi. Though there is much emotional turbulence in this music, Hill maintains a compelling life and forward momentum in Howells's immensely contrapuntal score (it being three minutes shorter than Rozhdestvensky's) and this interpretation also benefits from the serendipity of a vocal score with the composer's tempo revisions which Hill chanced upon shortly before the recording was made. The Bach Choir has a palpable vibrancy in its range and layers of dynamics which are complemented by the extensive and highly sensitive palette of Howells's orchestra (beautifully executed here by the Bournemouth SO) and the incisive solo tenor role of Benjamin Hulett. Particularly impressive are the opening movement, the procession-like 'Cujus



### Latin American Guitar Favourites

Warren Nicholson, Classical Guitar Works by Villa-Lobos, Brouwer, Cardoso & Barrios

"Not only did I like his playing, I also liked the sound of this record. The sonics are so crystal-clear that you'd swear he was in the room with you [...] This is an absolutely fascinating CD, highly recommended to all lovers of classical guitar."

— Lynn René Bayley, Fanfare

"Nicholson gives sensitive and sensible renditions with plain down-to-earth performances."

— Steve Marsh, Classical Guitar Magazine (UK)

"Delight of the week" –Sept 27th 2013.

— Kara Dahl Russell, *Just Opened* on WSCL Radio 89.5 Delmarva Public Radio animam genentem' and the powerfully climactic last two movements, 'Fac ut portem' and 'Christe, cum sit hine exire', true *tours de force* of balance and textural control.

Hill's exhilarating affinity for this music is also evident in the orchestral, neo-Elizabethan fantasy *Sine nomine* of 1922 (written, I would argue, during Howells's most fecund period), an example of impressionistic pastoralism at its most numinous, while the orchestration of the *Te Deum*, composed in 1944 for King's College, Cambridge, transforms the familiar into something quite new. A stunning disc. **Jeremy Dibble**Stabat mater – selected comparison:

LSO, Rozbdestvensky (1/95%) (CHAN) CHAN241-27

#### Laitman

Holocaust 1944

**Dashon Burton** *bass-bar* **Logan Coale** *db* Acis (F) APL27357 (29' • DDD)



Numerous composers have attempted to render the Holocaust (or at least some aspect

of it) in music, often without the ends justifying their means. The present work, though, does not fall victim to its ambition: indeed, having already composed one such song-cycle – I Never Saw Another Butterfly (recorded by Hila Plitmann on Signum) -Lori Laitman was well placed to delve further into the wealth of poetry from Holocaust victims and survivors. The outcome is Holocaust 1944, seven songs in which the sombre restraint of the bassbaritone register is ideally complemented by its accompaniment for double bass. In spite (or perhaps because) of these restrictions, the sequence unfolds seamlessly and inevitability - with not a little wry humour to offset the prevailing mood of numbed tragedy. Dominant in expressive weight are the third and seventh settings: 'Both Your Mothers' sets a text by Jerzy Ficowski concerning the survival of life after another's 'death', while 'Holocaust 1944' sets stanzas by Anne Ranasinghe in which recollection can only bring with it a sense of waste and futility.

Projecting this music with the required intensity, while avoiding affectation, cannot be easy but Dashon Burton admirably conveys its understated eloquence, and in Logan Coale has a bassist of a dexterity matched by his feeling for melodic line; the whole recorded in a warmly sympathetic ambience. It would have been easy to extend the disc with further examples by

this prolific song composer, though such a piece ideally needs to be heard on its own terms. Richard Whitehouse

#### Mahler

Rückert-Lieder<sup>a</sup>. Kindertotenlieder<sup>b</sup>. Ich ging mit Lust durch einem grünen Wald<sup>b</sup>. Aus! Aus!<sup>b</sup>. Nicht wiedersehen!<sup>b</sup>. Winterlied<sup>b</sup>

Teddy Tahu Rhodes bass-bar bSharolyn Kimmorley pf a Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra / Marko Letonja ABC Classics (© ABC481 0484 (65' • DDD)



Previous ABC releases from this popular Australian bassbaritone have included

a Mozart album which shows off the lighter side of a powerful vocal personality (A/05) and a recital of 'Serious Songs' in which he embodies the world-weary wanderer of Brahms's Requiem and the late cycle of the album-title. He brings the same vocal personality to this Mahler recital but its unvaried, unrelieved effect is like Wotan with a hangover. He is surely too lugubrious for the 'gentle fragrance' of the lighter Rückert-Lieder - though the low keys chosen don't help - and as a consequence the two introverted songs in the cycle feel heavily dragged beyond their natural phrase lengths. Slightly unsteady in the lower ranges of the slower songs and stretched by the upper reaches likewise, he is almost drowned at the climax of 'Um Mitternacht', where the lower winds of the Tasmanian SO make the most of Mahler's glissando instructions to unsettling effect.

This may be one reason why Tahu Rhodes reverts to the piano version of Kindertotenlieder, though Sharolyn Kimmorley's piano sounds closer to the mic than he does. Here again, however, a brief comparison with Christian Gerhaher's recent recording will show what's missing. Without a more detailed response to the text, the inward quality of Gerhaher's projection becomes maudlin here; though 'Wenn dein Mütterlein' trips along, the rhythm sags and deprives the song of its concluding twist. Singing at the same pitch, Gerhaher sounds much higher - not necessarily an advantage, though his articulation is, understandably, more evidently native - but at every turn digs deeper. Peter Quantrill

Rückert-Lieder, Kindertotenlieder – selected comparison: Gerhaber, Montreal SO, Nagano (6/14) (SONY) 88883 70133-2

#### J Novák

Testamentum<sup>a</sup>. Fugae vergilianae. Invitatio pastorum<sup>b</sup>. Exercitia mythologica

Martinů Voices / Lukáš Vasilek with

bClara Nováková // aJan Vobořil, aPetr Hernych,
aKateřina Javůrková, aZdeněk Vašina hns
Supraphon ® SU4159-2 (58' • DDD)



Jan Novák was born in Moravia in 1921 and, after many problems with the Communist

authorities and travels abroad that included sojourns in Italy and Denmark and studies in America with Martinů and Copland, died in Germany in 1984. He was posthumously honoured by President Václav Havel in 1996. Also belated but deserving is the recognition among music lovers that has begun to come his way.

The choral pieces recorded here reflect Novák's fascination with Latin, both the language and classical culture, informed with a beguiling wit, elegance and humour. They also make considerable demands upon the technique and quickwittedness of the brilliant singers and conductor here. These are accompanied by four undaunted horns in Testamentum, a mock list of bequests attributed to the poet Villon (rather on the lines of Auden and MacNeice's similar jeu d'esprit). Virgilian Fugues are indeed four musical fugues, punning with great virtuosity on the word's meaning of 'fleeing'. More substantial is the Christmas cantata Invitatio pastorum, in which the shepherds persist, against interventions from a cross bunch of devils, in seeking out the Christ Child, and succeed with their arrival at Bethlehem and triumphant 'alleluias' into which are sneaked allusions to the familiar carol O come all ye faithful. Mythological Exercises, to Novák's own Latin texts, are eight thumbnail sketches that include Apollo, Orpheus, an erotic Erato, Midas (with his ass's ears, a critic of course), the learned Minerva and finally a jazzily dancing Terpsichore. A most entertaining and exhilarating disc of music by an inventive and intelligent composer. John Warrack

#### Schneider-Trnavský

Selections from the song-cycles Tears and Smiles, Op 25. Little Flowers. From the Heart, Op 35. Slovak National Songs and independent songs Pavol Breslik ten Róbert Pechanec pf Viva Musica! (£) 513588 (76' • DDD • T/t)



As I had never heard of this composer before and as my knowledge of Slovak

poetry is as non-existent as yours, I thought it would be interesting to first listen to this disc blindfold, as it were. What would his tonal language be? Could I tell from the nature of the music and their performances what they were about? First impressions revealed, surprisingly given the composition dates, a late-Romantic tonal, melodic idiom that put me in mind of Grieg though often with more technically demanding accompaniments. Pavol Breslik (b1979, Slovakia), who has been making a name for himself on the European opera/ oratorio circuit, is a pleasingly ardent lyric tenor partnered by Róbert Pechanec, whose full-bodied contributions are given their due weight in the sound picture.

As confirmed by the booklet's dual texts, the songs - in style they are a mix of folksong and late-Victorian balladry – concern fervent lovers, feckless lovers, unrequited lovers, drinking and Mother Nature. Mikuláš Schneider-Trnavský (1881-1958) made several important collections of Slovak songs between 1903 and 1911. He added to these arrangements his own settings of texts by Slovak poets such as Svetozár Hurban Vajanský and Ferko Urbánek, creating works 'possessing a national or folk tinge'. Attractive as these are, the booklet's claim that the six songs From the Heart, Op 35, 'belong to the most popular compositions of all time' is a trifle over-optimistic, but any number could find a place in a recital. The 25 songs come in a sturdy, handsomely produced booklet. Jeremy Nicholas

#### **Todd**

'Lux et Veritas: Music for Peace and Reflection' Agnus Dei. A Celtic Blessing. Christus est stella. Encircled. Exalt Us. For Peace. In this Place. No More Sorrow. O Lux Beata. Precious Moment. Remembrance. Softly. Sanctus. Tidings

Tenebrae; English Chamber Orchestra /
Nigel Short with James Sherlock org/pf

Nigel Short with James Sherlock org/p Signum © SIGCD394 (66' • DDD • T/t)



If Will Todd wants to be 'the new John Rutter', as he has already extensively

been touted, then this new disc of choral anthems isn't going to hurt his cause. Barely 30 seconds in and we're already squarely in a world of angels, starlight and soothing musical platitudes. There's no doubting Todd's skill; his recent *Alice in Wonderland* for Opera Holland Park and his jazz-infused *Mass in Blue* have proved he can balance popular appeal with substance. But there's a void at the musical core of the

works of 'Lux et Veritas' – the composer's second collaboration with Nigel Short and his chamber choir Tenebrae – that is hard to overlook.

Melodically unmemorable and texturally repetitious, these anthems feel like a set of variations on a shared theme that the composer himself never quite discovers. We have to wait a good 10 tracks, until the musical narrative of *Tidings*, for anything approaching counterpoint or rhythmic interest, and any personality in the preceding works is lost in the mist of the English Chamber Orchestra's soft-focus strings and a piano accompaniment that ripples with the mindless persistence of a fover water-feature (though it is deftly played by James Sherlock). Even the excellent Tenebrae seem defeated by music and texts (many written by Todd himself) that dissolve into a haze of cuddly spiritual affirmation. The choir lack their characteristic glow and depth of tone. Perhaps this music might more effectively be sung by a children's choir? In the mouths of adults its bland innocence curdles into something that comes perilously close to cynicism.

Alexandra Coghlan

#### Verdi

Six Romances (1838). Six Romances (1845). L'esule. La seduzione. Il poveretto. Stornello. Tantum ergo. Ave Maria

Ramón Vargas ten Joanna Parisi sop Charles Spencer pf Capriccio (F) C5170 (66' • DDD)



Verdi's songs are worth searching out by those who already know the operas.

Ramón Vargas, who has sung a dozen or so of the operas from the early *I Lombardi* to *Falstaff*, is well placed to embrace the outgoing emotion of the opera house and, at least occasionally, the softness of touch needed for the drawing room.

He sings the main two groups of Six Romances, dating from 1838 and 1845, complete with the help of soprano Joanna Parisi, a rather shrill and tremulous companion, who takes on Gretchen's 'Perduta ho la pace' from *Faust* (though not her prayer, 'Deh, pietoso, oh Addolorata', persuasively sung by Vargas). The 1838 set offers a foretaste of *Il trovatore*, especially in the surging cantilena of 'In solitaria stanza', where Vargas is in somewhat gritty voice but smoulders with emotional heat. By and large, the 1845 set contains the better songs, especially the brooding 'Il mistero',

nicely contrasted with lighter pieces like the 'Brindisi', sung here by Vargas in its second version. The recital opens with four stand-alone songs – Vargas sounds strained in the lengthy 'L'esule' when he adds decorations and a top C – and ends with two sacred numbers, 'Tantum ergo' and 'Ave Maria', where Charles Spencer's always expert piano accompaniments do duty for other instruments.

Among the competition, Renata Scotto offers a more complete survey of Verdi's song output, including some rather footling titbits and the playful 'Il brigidino'. Margaret Price, in her DG recital, sings all the expected numbers and brings to them a radiance and aristocracy of style that are special. Richard Fairman

Selected comparisons:

Price, Parsons (9/87<sup>R</sup>) (ELOQ) ELQ480 5368 Scotto, Washington, Scalera (NUOV) 7285 or 231725

#### Vivaldi

'Pietà'

Clarae stellae, scintillate, RV625. Stabat mater, RV621. Filiae maestae Jerusalem, RV638. Gloria, RV589 - Domine Deus. Longe mala, umbrae, terrores, RV629. Salve regina, RV618. Concerto. RV120

Philippe Jaroussky *counterten* Ensemble Artaserse Erato (F) 2564 62581-0 (78' • DDD)



The title 'Pietà' alludes to the Ospedale della Pietà, the girls' orphanage in

Venice with which Vivaldi was associated on and off for many years (although never as official maestro di cappella). Perhaps it also conveys the Roman Catholic imagery of Mary's grieving for the crucified Jesus, which we find recounted in Stabat mater not written for a girl at the Pietà but a commission from Brescia's Philippine church in 1712. Like all the finest recordings of Vivaldi's sublime hymn, from Sara Mingardo (Naïve, 7/00) to Daniel Taylor (BIS, 11/09) and every shade of singer in between, Philippe Jaroussky strikes a contoured balance between poetic tenderness in the narrative, emotional expressiveness of the descriptions of Mary's anguish and sorrow ('Cuius animam gementem') and lyrical softness in the arialike verses (such as the whispered piety of 'Eia mater, fons amoris').

The similarity between passages of *Stabat mater* and a request for zephyrs to be silent in *Filiae maestae Jerusalem* demonstrates why musicians usually avoid putting these two works together in the same



A choir to watch: Key Ensemble's new recording offers pictures of 'the Virgin Mary in the Northern Lights', including Anders Hillborg's 'screen saver' muoaeyiyaoum

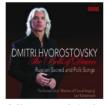
programme. Ensemble Artaserse sway serenely in the cheerful motet Clarae stellae, scintillate, sung by the girl Getrulda at the Pietà chapel in 1715. After the zesty turbulence of Longe mala, umbrae, terrores (probably written for Rome), Jaroussky's survey concludes with the gorgeously pathetic Salve regina (RV618): this masterpiece is packed with imaginative details, such as the simple opening passage for unsupported fugal violins, a sublime description of pious sighing in 'Ad te suspiramus', the appearance of a pair of oboes in 'Eia ergo advocata nostra' and delectable double-orchestra strings in the closing invocation to 'o dulcis Virgo Maria'. David Vickers

#### **Dmitri Hvorostovsky**

'The Bells of Dawn - Russian Sacred and Folk Songs'

Arkhangelsky Symbol of Faith Burmagin The Wise Thief Chesnokov Blessed is the man. Pre-Eternal Counsel. Hear my prayer. From My Youth Khristov Praise the name of the Lord Shashina I walk my path alone Sviridov The Bells of Dawn Varlamov A snowstorm sweeps the street Traditional They do not let Masha.... There is not one path through the field. The Lonely Coach Bell. Farewell, my joy. The fog has fallen on to the field. Oh, night

Dmitri Hvorostovsky bar The Grand Choir 'Masters of Choral Singing' / Lev Kontorovich Ondine ® ODE1238-2 (64' • DDD • T/t)



Dmitri Hvorostovsky's new disc explores two potent strands of Russia's musical fabric,

folksong and Orthodox Church anthems, separated in this programme by the wellknown song 'A snowstorm sweeps the street' by Alexander Varlamov and ending with Georgy Sviridov's Pushkin setting 'The Bells of Dawn', from which the recording takes its title. The singing here, backed by the rich sonorities of The Grand Choir 'Masters of Choral Singing', is more sophisticated than you might expect to hear in your average Russian church on a Sunday morning but Hvorostovsky does not over-egg it. In the characteristically lush harmonies of Pavel Chesnokov's anthems, Hvorostovsky strikes a note of artless sincerity, matching the choir in mellifluousness, control of melodic line and in unaffected expressiveness.

Here and in works by Dobri Khristov, Mikhail Burmagin and Alexander Arkhangelsky, the overwhelming impression is that the music is close to Hvorostovsky's heart, its dramatic impact directed at a higher power than the mere operatic stage. The lovely Varlamov song, arranged for soloist and mixed choir by the conductor Lev Kontorovich, acts as a bridge to the disc's folk component. Here Hvorostovsky is equally in his element, finding the spontaneity of phrasing and the subtle inflections of joy and sadness (mainly sadness) that these timeless narratives embrace: the three songs that Hvorostovsky sings without the chorus are especially telling of his interpretative intensity and sensibility. 'The Bells of Dawn' by Sviridov, whose Esenin cycle Russia Cast Adrift Hvorostovsky memorably recorded in the 1990s, makes for a poignantly nostalgic envoi.

**Geoffrey Norris** 

#### 'Ave Maria'

'Virgin Mary in the Northern Lights'
Anonymous Ave maris stella (arr Klemetti)
Byström Lux aeterna Heiniö Maria Suite
Hillborg muoaeyiyaoum Nystedt Stabat mater<sup>a</sup>
Rautavaara Canticum Mariae virginis
Samuelson Ave maris stella
Key Ensemble / Teemu Honkanen with

aErkki Lahesmaa vc

Fuga (F) FUGA9351 (66' • DDD)



This is an imaginative programme of settings of Marian texts by Nordic composers,

including Anonymous (the *Ave maris stella* from the *Piae cantiones* collection). The standard is set by a fine rendition of Rautavaara's *Canticum Mariae virginis* from 1978, a work I am always surprised to see so infrequently in concerts and recordings. It's not easy but it has beautifully lush choral textures and what I can only describe as a cumulative sense of wonder that more than justify the effort, though the Key Ensemble sound as though they have the piece in their blood.

Britta Byström's mysterious, floating Lux aeterna may seem not actually to fit the programme thematically but it does in atmosphere, suggesting the Northern Lights, and once again seems to have found the perfect interpreters in the Key Ensemble. Mikko Heiniö's rhythmically and harmonically colourful Maria Suite, a Key Ensemble commission, is quite different, traversing languages and cultures to provide five different Marian visions, beginning with a spiritual and ending with the Slavonic 'Bogoroditse Devo', using the Valamo chant as a cantus firmus. Hillborg's muoaeyiyaoum is another 'lights' piece - the booklet-notes actually describe it, appropriately, as a 'screen saver' of tremendous intensity and beauty. Nystedt's Stabat mater is described as a 'programmatic concerto for cello and mixed choir', though it gets through the lengthy text in only just over 15 minutes.

Bror Samuelson's lush *Ave maris stella* brings this adventurous and magnificently sung programme full circle. This is a choir to watch. **Ivan Moody** 

#### 'La belle excentrique'

Cockenpot Colchiques dans les prés Fauré
Spleen, Op 51 No 3. En sourdine, Op 58 No 2.
Les berceaux, Op 23 No 1 Ferré Jolie môme Gavrochinette. On s'aimera Hahn Pholoé.
A Chloris Poulenc Voyage à Paris. Hier. Autre
Chansons pour enfants - No 2, La tragique
histoire du petit René. Ba, be, bi, bo, bu. Chanson
d'Orkenise. Aux officiers de la garde blanche.
Hôtel Rosenthal Rêverie. Pêcheur de lune.
L'éléphant du jardin des plantes. Fido, Fido.
Le vieux chameau du zoo. La Goulue Satie Les
courses. La belle excentrique (two versions). Les
gars qui vont à la fête. La statue de bronze. Le
Pique-nique. Allons-y Chochotte. Je te veux.
Désespoir agréable

**Patricia Petibon** *sop* **Susan Manoff** *pf* with **Olivier Py** *voc* **Nemanja Radulović** *vn* 

Christian-Pierre La Marca vc David Levi pf David Venitucci acco François Verly perc DG (© 479 2465GH (65' • DDD)



Patricia Petibon's photo along with some art nouveau-ish script implies music from the

belle époque. But no. This far more personal album comes by its 'excentrique' with madcap creations of Poulenc and Satie, sexy forays into popular modern song and quirky instrumental interludes between them all. Any guiding vision isn't tidy or clear but 'La belle excentrique' is one of Petibon's best discs so far.

Early on, she's the master of Edith Piafstyle *Sprechtstimme*, grazing over notes, not quite alighting on any one pitch, making the vocal gesture paramount in a rollicking duet with actor Olivier Py in Leo Ferré's 'Pretty Girl'. She's Satie's absurdist, woozy-sounding soulmate in songs such as 'The Bronze Statue' and sounds like a street urchin low-life with scruffy-voiced Py in 'Allons-y Chochotte'. Poulenc's high-velocity patter has rarely sounded so effortless as with Petibon.

She also spins out a lyrical vocal line as beautifully as anybody, though some of the songs by Manuel Rosenthal still seem pretty thin. In more reflective songs, she goes for an unadorned intimacy that can make the music seem uneventful, though one still enjoys the many engaging facets of her vocal tone. I had great hopes for the Fauré and Hahn songs; and though she sings them with imaginative colouring, she doesn't own these composers the way she does Poulenc. Her vulnerability feels a tad mannered. David Patrick Stearns

#### 'Chanson d'avril'

'French chansons and mélodies'

**Bizet** Adieux de l'hôtesse Arabe. Ouvre ton coeur. Pastorale. Chanson d'avril **Duparc** L'invitation au voyage. Chanson triste. Au pays où se fait la guerre **Liszt** Enfant, si j'étais roi, S283. Oh! quand je dors, S282. S'il est un charmant gazon, S284. Comment, disaient-ils, S276 **Ravel** Shéhérazade. Cinq mélodies populaires grecques

Nicole Cabell sop Craig Terry pf Delos (E) DE3450 (65' • DDD)



The American soprano Nicole Cabell's recording career has been a curious one.

After winning the BBC Cardiff Singer of

the World in 2005, she went on to make her prize-winning debut disc, 'Soprano' (Decca, 5/07), which – though excellent – was more showcase than recital. Five years later a much quieter release followed in 'Silver Rain' (Blue Griffin, 1/13), a disc of songs by Ricky Ian Gordon. Now she returns with perhaps her most thoughtful programme to date.

'Chanson d'avril' capitalises on Cabell's flair for French repertoire, exploring a selection of chansons and mélodies by Bizet, Duparc, Liszt and Ravel. Ideas of the exotic recur throughout, whether in Bizet's 'Hôtesse arabe' or Ravel's *Shéhérazade*, evocatively drawn by Cabell's new depth and range of tone. What was once a supple lyric voice is now heading towards the more muscular lirico-spinto territory and it's a shift exploited fully – at times a little too fully – here.

The two Ravel works – *Shéhérazade* and *Cinq mélodies populaires grecques* – are outstanding, finding a range of colour lacking elsewhere. Cabell moves from bell-like sonorities in 'L'indifférent' to a muted, hazy loveliness for 'Chanson des cueilleuses de lentisque', before ending the cycle with a throwaway shrug of vocal sophistication in 'Tout gai', efficiently supported by Craig Terry at the piano.

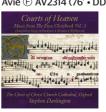
Both the Liszt and Duparc songs however suffer from a little too much force, too much weight in the sound, sacrificing the smaller details of textual nuance – so crucial in the Duparc, especially – for heft. Diction lacks definition, getting all but swept away by a very active vibrato.

Cabell's instrument is only improving and gaining personality, while her musical choices are becoming more creative. 'Chanson d'avril' is not her most polished album but it is surely a step towards something more interesting than her easy, early polish. Alexandra Coghlan

#### 'Courts of Heaven'

'Music from The Eton Choirbook, Vol 3' **Browne** O mater venerabilis **Fawkyner** Gaude virgo salutata **Hampton** Salve regina **Turges** Gaude flore virginali **Wylkynson** Salve regina **Christ Church Cathedral Choir**/

Stephen Darlington
Avie (F) AV2314 (76' • DDD • T/t)



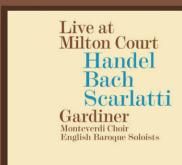
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### GRAMOPHONE Collector

### GOFRNE'S SCHUBERT JOURNEY

As Matthias Goerne's Schubert song survey ends, **Hugo Shirley** listens to the concluding Winterreise and catches up with its predecessors

atthias Goerne's Schubertian journey on Harmonia Mundi comes to an end with a natural choice of work, Winterreise. He's recorded the cycle before: with Alfred Brendel (Philips, 9/04) a decade ago, and with Graham Johnson, in Hyperion's Schubert edition (1/98), nearly two decades ago. And Hyperion's completist survey offers an interesting contrast to HM's series, a leisurely singer-led stroll through a carefully selected and programmed (one's tempted to employ that over-used word 'curated') array of Schubert song, for which Goerne is joined by some half a dozen different pianists.

Reviewing previous releases, *Gramophone*'s writers have repeatedly drawn attention to

Goerne's world-weary manner, his innate suitability for the reflective, otherworldly Schubert. Certain (probably apocryphal) phrases from Schubert's life have been suggested as epigraphs for different instalments: 'Do you know any happy music? I don't,' for one; 'It sometimes seems to me as if I did not belong to this world at all,' for another. Introducing Vol 8, a two-CD set with Helmut Deutsch and Eric Schneider (5/14), Richard Wigmore put it succinctly: 'With his velvety, "covered" timbre and innate seriousness of manner, Goerne has never been a natural bringer of jollity.'

Jollity, though, is not what *Winterreise* is about, and the German baritone's temperament and timbre find a near-ideal match in the great cycle. In the releases of *Die schöne Müllerin* and *Schwanengesang*, also with Christoph Eschenbach, one often has the sense of interpretative boundaries being pushed. The slower songs, in particular, were stretched out in a way



End of the road: Matthias Goerne's 'never less than totally serious' Schubert series reaches its conclusion

that, depending on one's view, is either mesmerising or hopelessly indulgent – or both. 'Des Baches Wiegenlied' in the first cycle is spun out to last over nine minutes, 'Der Doppelgänger' to over six. (There are similar performances throughout the series, such as an eight-minute 'Litanei' with Deutsch in Vol 8).

One of the most surprising things about the new Winterreise is possibly that it contains relatively few of these experiments, even if as the cycle comes to its conclusion Goerne casts a hypnotic, melancholic veil over the proceedings. Otherwise experimentation is largely confined to Eschenbach's striking accompaniment. His contributions largely avoid sounding tricksy or self-regarding, yet in each song he finds nuances, a new way of articulating a phrase or voicing a chord, and the result is constantly refreshing, as well as being a marvel of technique. The staccatos of 'Auf dem Flusse' and the chords in 'Einsamkeit' are gauged with telling precision, for

example, while the introduction to 'Täuschung' is of astonishing delicacy.

In fact, the pianist's effects occasionally threaten to highlight a certain lack in Goerne's own expressive palette. The singer can't match the beautifully sprung rhythms of Eschenbach's playing in 'Die Post' with a smile in the voice in the repetitions of 'mein Herz'. Similarly, he struggles to lighten the mood when required in 'Frühlingstraum', in which he opts for a daringly slow tempo in the final section (as he did, to an even greater extent, with Johnson). He could find more lyricism in the last line of 'Letzte Hoffnung'; and I wasn't entirely convinced by the slow 'Lindenbaum', despite its remarkable flexibility. In some other songs - 'Mut!', for example - the voice sounds a little gruff, and 'Nebensonnen' strikes me as a little matter-of-fact.

But these are minor gripes, given the quiet intensity, the almost meditative sense of concentration Goerne achieves throughout the cycle. The virtues familiar from previous releases are here in abundance, with the words coming across clearly but without undue emphasis, sitting on a smooth legato line. The sound itself is of course supremely beautiful, if unusual. Its slightly nutty, occasionally hazy quality has become more pronounced over the years (comparison with the more cleanly produced sound we hear on the 1998 Hyperion disc is telling), and is emphasised further by engineering from HM that is a little too reverberant.

Unlike some more recent *Winterreises*, Goerne's latest is more pensive than dramatic, more contemplative, perhaps, than demonstrative, but it is quietly compelling, and few can capture such a sense of the uncanny in 'Die Krähe', sustain such concentration in a beautifully hushed performance of 'Das Wirtshaus' or conjure up some residual nobility in the hopelessness of 'Der Leiermann'.

And the series as a whole? Goerne's Schubert has its eccentricities and, in terms of the lighter, more joyous side of the composer, its deficiencies. Never less than totally serious, never less than artfully sung, and beautifully packaged by Harmonia Mundi, however, these dozen discs undoubtedly make the Schubertian world a richer place. **6** 

#### THE RECORDINGS



Schubert Winterreise Goerne, Eschenbach Harmonia Mundi (P) HMC90 2107

these straitened times. Moreover, it has contributed to the discography in two important respects: first, by almost single-handedly championing the performances of this repertory with boy trebles, the voice-type for which the treble parts were composed; and second, by focusing more than any earlier ensemble on previously unrecorded pieces. This is not merely a matter of 'filling in the gaps'. It was more difficult to evaluate the major Eton figures (chiefly Browne, Lambe, Davy) when the music of their lesserknown colleagues was accessible only on paper; besides, Darlington's selection is of such quality that the gap between major and minor figures is rather narrower than I, for one, had supposed. A case in point is Fawkyner, whose entire surviving output (all of two pieces) can now be heard thanks to this series.

The programme alternates antiphons with trebles and without. The stamina shown by the trebles is at all times remarkable, and this particular crop raises the recording nearer to the level of the first in the series than did the second. Their resilience might have been taxed less if tempi in duple-time selections had been just a touch faster, but in general the balance between intricate detail and overall sonority is very well rendered. Finally, a note to all you John Browne 'completists' out there: here is the first recording in nearly 50 years of Browne's O mater venerabilis. A bonus track from the sessions not included for reasons of space (Lambe's Nesciens mater) is available on the major streaming sites. Fabrice Fitch

#### 'Music for Remembrance'

**Duruflé** Requiem, Op 9<sup>a</sup> **Howells** Take him, earth, for cherishing **Moore** Three Prayers of Dietrich Bonhoeffer **Tavener** The peace that surpasseth all understanding **Vaughan Williams** Lord, thou hast been our refuge

<sup>a</sup>Christine Rice *mez* <sup>a</sup>Roderick Williams *bar*Choir of Westminster Abbey; <sup>a</sup>Britten Sinfonia /
James O'Donnell with Robert Quinney *org*Hyperion ® CDA68020 (75' • DDD • T/t)



This is an exquisite performance of the Duruflé Requiem, beautifully evoking the

inherent intimacy of the version with chamber orchestra and organ accompaniment, yet wielding great power at the climaxes, where the weight of the Westminster Abbey organ comes into its own. The playing of the Britten Sinfonia is superb, Robert Quinney's fluid, immensely

colourful organ-playing a joy to behold and Roderick Williams a supremely compelling baritone soloist. The Abbey Choir boys occasionally sound pressured (as in their exposed divided 'Christe eleison') but for the most part this singing is simply divine, and James O'Donnell moulds and shapes every moment with infinite care, the chantinfused lines dovetailing impeccably. It sounds unequivocally English (no harm in that) and lacks the intensity of Matthew Best's Corydon Singers - whose recording, now almost 30 years old, still reigns supreme in the available versions of Duruflé's third and, to my way of thinking, most successful version of this oft-recorded work - but as a beautiful listening experience it is in a class of its own.

Loosely connected by commemorations marking the centenary of the First World War and 75th anniversary of the Second, the programme seems a bit of a hotchpotch; and, recorded in two different locations on several different occasions, there is a certain unevenness about the disc as a whole. The choir is at its very best in the unaccompanied works (recorded in the headier environment of St Alban's Church, Holborn), relishing the rhythmic and harmonic immediacy of Philip Moore's three unaccompanied Prayers and the lush, luminous textures of Herbert Howells's moving tribute to President Kennedy.

The spacious acoustic of Westminster Abbey certainly comes to the rescue of Vaughan Williams's rambling arrangement of the hymn tune *St Anne*, and it swarms around the ethereal harmonies of Tavener's powerfully atmospheric setting of words from St Paul, gracefully swallowing up the choir's extended final syllable to close the disc with a pretty convincing vision of eternity. **Caroline Gill** 

Duruflé – selected comparison: Corydon Sgrs, ECO, Best (5/86<sup>R</sup>, 4/87) (HYPE) CDA66191

## 'A Tribute to Krzysztof Penderecki'

Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima. Duo concertante. Concerto grosso No 1. Credo Iwona Hossa, Ewa Vesin sops Agnieszka Rehlis mez Rafał Bartmiński ten Nikolaj Didenko bass Anne-Sophie Mutter vn Daniel Müller-Schott, Arto Noras, Ivan Monighetti vcs Roman Patkoló db Warsaw Boys' Choir; Warsaw Philharmonic Choir; Polish National Opera Chorus; Sinfonia Varsovia / Charles Dutoit, Valery Gergiev, Krzysztof Urbański

Accentus (P. ACC20276 (106' + 15' • NTSC • 16:9 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • 0 • s)

Bonus: Penderecki talks about the concert Recorded live at the Polish National Opera, Warsaw, November 23, 2013



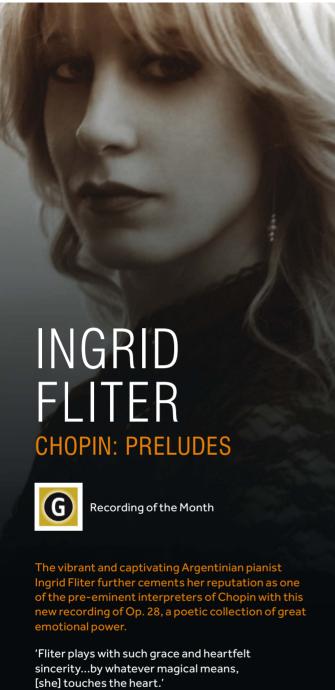
As Poland's most famous living composer, Penderecki might expect to have been feted on his 80th

birthday, as indeed it proved with this ambitious concert given in Warsaw last November. It opened with his most (in) famous piece: Threnody to the Victims of Hiroshima (1960) fairly catapulted the composer to the forefront of the European avant-garde and, over five decades on, its extremes of timbre and texture still leave a fearsome impression - not least in a reading as unsparing as that which Krzysztof Urbański here obtains from the Warsaw Philharmonic strings. Forward almost to the present, and Duo concertante (2010) is among the most tensile and virtuoso of his recent chamber pieces -Anne-Sophie Mutter and Roman Patkoló taking all its demands effortlessly in their stride. As do the three cellists in the First Concerto grosso (2001), with Penderecki delving into Baroque procedures between the concertante group and vis-à-vis the orchestra in an idiom well within the ambit of that post-Romantic ideal he has pursued over 40 years. Charles Dutoit draws a sumptuous response.

The second half consisted of Credo (1998), which the composer considers to be one of his most important works. An extended and elaborate setting of the liturgical text, this contains its fair share of the plangent outbursts such as characterise his large-scale choral pieces, yet there are also several passages of inwardness and contemplation that open out the expressive range accordingly. The five soloists are comparably dedicated in their response, with Gergiev encouraging the massed choirs to project their contributions with a suitably baleful intensity and the orchestra (offstage brass et al) to play with burnished eloquence. The concert is filmed in the opulent ambience of Polish National Opera's new venue, with the camerawork as attentive to incidental detail as to the bigger picture. The booklet essay has a pertinent overview of the event, while the bonus feature finds Penderecki commenting on each of the works with deprecating immodesty - which might just be the best means of approaching this always unequivocal music in the first place. Richard Whitehouse

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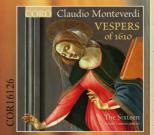


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## REISSUES

In the first of a two-part round-up, **James Jolly** recommends some of the year's most appealing sets

## Best box-sets of 2014



Kyung-Wha Chung presents Sir James Galway with his Lifetime Achievement Award - both have major reissues

he Big Box-Set is clearly now making a substantial contribution to the major companies' bottom line and there have been some very enticing releases during the past 12 months. This month and next, I'm going to feature some of the sets that have caught my ear.

Herbert von Karajan, who died 25 years ago this summer, has received the 'box treatment' from both Warner (mining his EMI catalogue) and DG. From the last batch of Warner boxes, the one I enjoyed most was the seven-CD set of recordings from 1970-81 featuring the Berlin Philharmonic and the Orchestre de Paris (which he headed as Music Adviser from 1969 to 1971). Karajan had a long relationship with French music and this set embraces a fair amount, including one of the works he was drawn back to regularly, Debussy's *La mer*. In his note to the set, Kenneth Woods traces Karajan's relationship with the work, one that started in Aachen 1935 and continued until 1985 when he gave it on his last European tour. This performance, from 1977, is nicely characterised by Woods: 'A flair for sonic

sensuality, an ability to find fluidity in moderate tempi and a visceral delight in sheer orchestral virtuosity.' Karajan's only recording of *La valse* (Paris, 1971) is intriguing and rather wonderful (not surprising given Karajan's skill in the Viennese music that provoked Ravel's work). The shorter works, all the key works of the popular Debussy/Ravel oeuvre, are stylishly done.

I had fond memories of the Franck Symphony performance (another Paris recording) and, returning to it all these years later, was not disappointed. It's grandly conceived but, given Karajan's ability to place the climaxes exactly (as in Bruckner), it really works. The string sound is a tiny bit strident but not worryingly so. Elegant accounts of Dvořák's Eighth and Ninth symphonies (Berlin, 1977 and '79) and the last three Tchaikovskys – classical in conception, vibrant and embracing huge contrasts in dynamics - conform to the Karajan approach (which stayed relatively consistent throughout his career). The Bartók Concerto for Orchestra is virtuoso and full

of imaginative approaches to colour and texture; the sound is pretty rich.

A large-format (LP box-set-size) package from DG - Karajan: Strauss gathers together all of Karajan's analogue recordings of Richard Strauss for the company (with two discs' worth borrowed from Decca). That means we get Gundula Janowitz's Four Last Songs rather than Tomowa-Sintow's, and the 1960 live Rosenkavalier with Della Casa, Jurinac, Güden and Edelmann rather than the later set with Tomowa-Sintow, Baltsa, Perry et al. Della Casa, always light-voiced for the Marschallin, is on great form and captures the eroticism of her relationship with Sena Jurinac's Octavian. Hilde Güden is in better voice elsewhere but still enchanting. Edelmann is in control of the comedy of his role, and the smaller parts are cast with a perfect feeling for the Viennese idiom. Karajan's conducting is wonderfully elegant and more relaxed than in the studio. The mono sound is fine.

Karajan was one of the great Strauss conductors and there's much to enjoy throughout this set. I don't understand why DG 'bought in' the VPO-Decca Also sprach Zarathustra – the recording Stanley Kubrick used for 2001: A Space Odyssey - when Karajan's classic Berlin version ('one of the most perfectly conceived and executed documents ever committed to disc' according to Philip Clark's Collection in the Awards issue) is there already. The inclusion of the 1943 Concertgebouw Till Eulenspiegel, Salome's Dance of the Seven Veils and Don Juan makes for a fascinating comparison with later versions (both in Berlin and Vienna) and the whole Karajan-Strauss story is told with characteristic insight in the accompanying essay by Richard Osborne. For audiophiles there's a Blu-ray disc that contains the key orchestral works (discs 1-6) and sounds terrific. (Presto charges £91.50 for the 12 discs.)

Deutsche Grammophon's systematic reissue of the entire (non-operatic) Karajan discography reaches its third and final volume: Karajan: The 1980s (the conductor died in July 1989). The final decade, enshrined on 78 CDs (£149 from Presto), is a difficult one to assess. Much of the repertoire was being recorded for the third, even fourth time, and earlier versions often have the edge. When singers were involved his first and second thoughts often employed bigger vocal personalities (I'm thinking of the Haydn Creation, Brahms German Requiem, Mozart Requiem, Verdi Requiem and Beethoven Missa solemnis). But there is still much to enjoy and reflect on here,

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Murray Perahia's Sony Chopin discs are boxed up

not least the many now-classic recordings - the live Mahler Ninth, the 1989 New Year's Day Concert, the Holst Planets, the famous encounter with Jessye Norman for the Tristan Liebestod and the late, and wondrous, Vienna Bruckner Seventh and Eighth symphonies. In 1980 Karajan had been at the helm of the Berlin Phil for 26 years and he and the orchestra had an understanding that was quite extraordinarily close - vou've only to listen to the discs of music by the Strauss family to encounter playing of remarkable urbanity and style. The VPO may play this music with more warmth and elegance but the Berliners are pretty terrific.

The 1980s saw Karajan make his fourth Beethoven symphony cycle (his third in Berlin). For many people this was a cycle too many and, though it's not radically different from its predecessors, it's not just a dutiful re-run. The *Pastoral* (the one disappointment of the first BPO cycle) is glorious, the product of a lifetime's experience, beautifully unfolded. A fine *Choral*, an electric Fifth and, always a Karajan speciality, a taut Fourth are highlights.

Other remakes include a Shostakovich Tenth, a Debussy collection, Brahms symphonies and Richard Strauss's Also sprach Zarathustra - nothing to complain about as they're all characterful, but all are surpassed by earlier recordings. New to the Karajan discography are the Nielsen Fourth – quite fierce and, by today's standards, rather overblown - some of the early Bruckners and the complete Haydn 'Paris' and 'London' symphonies (deft but a little lacking in humour and slow movements tend to be a bit languid the one in the *Clock* is very sleepy). If you've been collecting the series, don't hesitate; if you've not I'd suggest you acquire the 1960s set without fail, and maybe cherry-pick the highlights from the

1980s set individually (many of them are available as Originals).

One of the highlights of this year's Gramophone Classical Music Awards ceremony was the reunion of the violinist Kyung-Wha Chung with this year's Lifetime Achievement Award winner, Sir James Galway. Both, as it happens, are the subjects of major reissues. The Kyung-Wha Chung set is a wonderful reminder of what an outstanding violinist she was during her Decca years (there are also a couple of discs borrowed from DG - the Respighi and Strauss violin sonatas which won a Gramophone Award, and one of the Beethoven Triple Concerto and Romances). The only major concerto not included here is the Brahms (which she recorded, post-Decca, for EMI); otherwise they're all here: the Tchaikovsky twice (Previn and Dutoit), the Beethoven, Bruch, Mendelssohn (Dutoit and, on DVD, with Solti), Bartóks, Prokofievs, Saint-Saëns Nos 1 and 3, Berg, Elgar and Walton. Chung's playing is gloriously musical, nothing is done for effect and it all emerges from the writtten notes – and her tone is invariably quite breathtakingly beautiful. I especially like her in 20th-century concertos - the Berg, Bartóks, Prokofievs, Stravinsky and Walton - where she captures the angularity and rhythmic life perfectly but never ignores the works' lyricism. The Decca recordings really are in a class of their own, capturing her tone with striking fidelity.

There's some chamber music here, too: apart from those excellent Respighi and Strauss sonatas, the Mendelssohn and Brahms First Piano Trios and Dvořák Nos 2 and 3 (with her siblings Myung-Wha and Myung-Whun) are vibrant and full of character, and her encores disc with Philip Moll is a delight. For £57.20 (from Presto), equalling £2.86 a disc, this is a set to treasure and is a fine memento of a great player. Excellent note by Tully Potter too.

At the Awards, Kyung-Wha Chung spoke affectionately about her 1979 recording with James Galway (and Philip Moll and Moray Welsh) of Bach trio sonatas. That reappears as disc 18 of the 71-CD and two-DVD set James Galway: The Man with the Golden Flute. It gathers his entire RCA catalogue into a substantial (and pretty heavy) box which Presto sells for £125. The clincher may be the word 'entire' because, for some, Galway's collaborations with The Chieftans, Cleo Laine, Phil Coulter and Henry Mancini may be a stumbling

block - I must say that I greatly enjoyed many of them, and besides, they complete the portrait of this remarkable musician. The classical fare probably embraces just about everything a flautist can tackle - and a good many of the works here were written or transsribed for Galway himself. I will always be grateful to him for commissioning the concerto - based on Poulenc's Flute Sonata - from Lennox Berkeley. Of core repertoire there are four versions of the Mozart flute concertos and Flute and Harp Concerto (each with Marisa Robles); I think I prefer the one with Marriner, though the Chamber Orchestra of Europe disc runs it close.

Galway's tone is instantly recognisable and no doubt inspired many composers - the Lowell Liebermann concertos and the Corigliano concertante works sound, not surprisingly, tailor-made, and the two Malcolm Arnold concertos, not actually written for Galway, receive possibly the finest performances of the entire set (Arnold's Flute Sonata, which was written for Galway, receives an exemplary reading). There are numerous treats here - the Prokofiev and Franck sonatas with Argerich, a gorgeous disc of Japanese music, the Nielsen and Khachaturian flute concertos and a disc of French flute sonatas.

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and 3, the Ballades, the Preludes and
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#### THE RECORDINGS

#### Herbert von Karajan 1970-1981

BPO, Orch de Paris / Karajan Warner Classics © 7 2564 63359-3

Karajan: Strauss BPO, VPO

DG (M) (1) + 32 88843 04505-2

**Karajan: The 1980s** BPO, VPO DG **(M)** (78 discs) 479 3448GB78

**Kyung-Wha Chung** The Complete

Decca Recordings
Decca M 19 + ₩ 478 7611DB20

James Galway The Man with the Golden Flute RCA Red Seal (\$) (78 CDs + 2 (2022)) 88843 02633-2

Murray Perahia plays Chopin Sony Classical © 6 88843 06243-2

# Opera



## Mike Ashman on a staging of an opera by the 'other' Tchaikowsky:

"Tchaikowsky has clearly heard and absorbed the form and lyricism of a Britten influenced by Berg' • REVIEW ON PAGE 93



## Lindsay Kemp reviews the latest exploration from Cecilia Bartoli:

'She is in complete technical command of this music, which in places is as challenging as you'll find in this period' > REVIEW ON PAGE 95

#### Caldara

La concordia de' pianeti	
Delphine Galou contr	Venere
Veronica Cangemi sop	Diana
Ruxandra Donose mez	Giove
Franco Fagioli counterten	Apollo
Carlos Mena counterten	Marte
Daniel Behle ten	Mercurio
Luca Tittoto bass	Saturno
Basle Vocal Ensemble; La Cetra	

Basle Vocal Ensemble; La Cetra
Baroque Orchestra / Andrea Marcon
Archiv © ② 479 3356AH2 (110' • DDD)



On November 19, 1723, Emperor Charles VI and his empress Elisabeth

stayed at Znojmo Castle in southern Moravia where Caldara's serenata *La concordia de' pianeti* was performed outdoors to celebrate the empress's name day. The one-act libretto by the imperial court poet Pietro Pariati is a static paean that depicts the harmonious planets marvelling to each other at the glorious beauty, wisdom and virtue of the empress 'Elisa'.

Recorded across several days of sessions either side of a concert performance in Dortmund, I'm not sure why the producer decided to edit in loud audience applause from the concert in advance of the performance, but La Cetra's relaxed trumpet flourishes, nonchalant rhythmical inégales and timely thundering timpani during the Introduzione instantly establish the attractiveness of Caldara's music. Daniel Behle navigates the tricky lines of Mercury's animated 'Tal se gemma e rara e bella' with composure, and Veronica Cangemi is on fine form in Diana's 'Ad essa io cederò', which praises the empress effusively but actually sounds rather like an operatic evocation of jealousy; its overlapping strings and lilting rhythms remind us that Caldara's Venetian roots are not so far away from those of his compatriot Vivaldi. Franco Fagioli's firm projective technique is displayed in Apollo's 'Questo dì così giocondo', whereas his

cleaner-toned colleague Carlos Mena is not entirely at home in Mars's most stretched passages of coloratura. Additional instruments are utilised sparingly: oboes and bassoons sparkle playfully in Jupiter's 'Alla bontade e al merto' (sung elegantly by Ruxandra Donose); Venus's 'Ad Elisa ancor d'intorno' has cello and plucked continuo providing a fandango-like accompaniment to Delphine Galou's polished singing; Mars's 'Da mia tromba' features limpid solo trumpet; and a chortling bassoon contributes to Saturn's 'Pari a quella il mondo vede', in which resonant bass Luca Tittoto compares Elisa's modesty, virtue and beauty to that of her daughters. There might be more engrossing works than this one that still await rediscovery but there's no disputing the qualities of Andrea Marcon's crisply directed performance. **David Vickers** 

#### Cavalli

***************************************	
Giasone	
David Hansen counterten	Giasone
Celeste Lazarenko sop	Medea
Miriam Allan sop	Isifile
Andrew Goodwin ten	Egeo
Christopher Saunders ten	Demo
David Greco bass	Orestes
Nicholas Dinopoulos bass	Ercole
Adrian McEniery ten	Delfa
Alexandra Oomens sop	Alinda
Pinchgut Opera; Orchestra of the Ar	ntipodes /
Erin Helyard	

Pinchgut Live © ② PG004 (151' • DDD) Recorded live at City Recital Hall, Angel Place, Sydney, December 5 & 7-9, 2013



Cavalli's *Giasone* (Venice Carnival, 1649) was originally structured into a

prologue and three acts, but the short prologue and numerous comic scenes are omitted from Pinchgut Opera's production and the three acts are restructured into a game of two abridged halves. This involves tinkering with the order of scenes and tampering with the content, such as relocating Medea's incantation 'Dell'antro magico' (in which she petitions the underworld to support Jason's quest to steal the golden fleece) to a slightly later position in the drama; the sorceress's explosive infatuation and dark powers are thrillingly communicated by Celeste Lazarenko, and the playing here of the Orchestra of the Antipodes provides a few punchy shocks. The hilarious flirting duet between Alinda and Besso is retained but all of Besso's contributions are transferred to Hercules (sung convivially by Nicholas Dinopoulos). These decisions were presumably made to fit the practical priorities of a flesh-and-blood staged production, and admittedly a few alterations help the plot to flow more logically.

The first appearance of the drowsy Jason – having spent the night in amorous activity with Medea and now doubtful if he has the energy to steal the golden fleece clearly had the audience tittering in the aisles throughout the gorgeous 'Delizie e contenti che l'alme beate', although the musical charms offered by the powerful countertenor David Hansen and the sensuous recorders and continuo group are suitably delightful. Hansen delights in hamming up the absurdities of the hapless 'hero', although Medea and Jason's duet as they fall asleep in each other's arms ('Dormi, dormi') is performed with subtle delicacy. Miriam Allan's stylish Hypsipyle steals the show several times over on account of an emotional range extending from a touching lament bewailing her abandonment by Jason ('Lassa, che far degg'io?') to her intense anguish at the opera's climax when she realises he tried to have her murdered in order to placate Medea ('Infelice, che ascolto?'). The comedic lower classes deliver appropriate ribaldry, such as the chronic stutterer Demo, whose report of having nearly drowned in pursuit of the Argo is wittily done by Christopher Saunders. Some audience laughter and a few bum notes only serve to enhance the atmosphere of

**86 GRAMOPHONE** NOVEMBER 2014 gramophone.co.uk

this vibrant perspective on Cavalli's notorious potpourri of tragic, beguiling and bawdy elements. David Vickers

#### Handel

'Heroes from the Shadows'

Agrippina - Voi che udite il mio lamento. Amadigi di Gaula - Ballo di pastori e pastorelle; Pena tiranna. Alessandro - Sarò qual vento. Arianna in Creta - Son qual stanco pellegrino. Ariodante - Dover, giustizia, amor. Giulio Cesare - L'aure che spira; Son nata/nato a lagrimara. Orlando - Sinfonia. Partenope - Sinfonia; lo seguo sol fiero. Poro - Sinfonia. Radamisto - Son contenta di morire. Rodelinda - Se fiera belva ha cinto. Scipione - Sinfonia. Serse - Sinfonia; Non so se sia la speme. Silla - Senti, bell'idol mio. Tamerlano - Par che mi nasca in seno

Nathalie Stutzmann contr

<sup>a</sup>Philippe Jaroussky counterten Orfeo 55
Erato ® 2564 62317-7 (80' • DDD)



Another Handel arias disc? Yes; although for once not just a rundown of usual arias

from roles a singer happens to have sung recently but a carefully themed recital which brings into the light music that has for the most part languished undeservedly in obscurity. 'Heroes from the Shadows' takes as its subject arias written for Handel's secondary characters which, though less celebrated, have just as much of the composer's genius in them. For Handel makes no distinction: arias for subsidiary characters are as likely to be as vividly illuminated by psychological insight as those for leading roles.

They do tend to attract less attention from top singers, however, so it is lucky that they are performed here by one of today's most distinguished Baroque voices. Nathalie Stutzmann's dark, smooth contralto is always a pleasure to hear but her expressive intensity, athletic virtuosity and emotional intelligence make it a valuable instrument indeed (and an authentic one too; all but two of these arias were written for female singers) - it is hard to imagine anyone bringing more depth and nobility to Handel's heart-rending slow arias of hopeless love. Yet it is not just a matter of singing slowly and beautifully: in Arsamene's aria from Serse, the word 'cor' at the end of the B section is barely sounded; Ottone breaks momentarily into speech in his aria from Agrippina; and 'Pena tiranna', the plaintive sarabande with pained oboe and bassoon lines for Dardano from Amadigi di Gaula is one of several arias to culminate in a surging climactic

final phrase and orchestral play-out. Subtle, considered and truthful touches like this make every aria, be it fast or slow, a memorably shaped event.

Everything about that shaping is attributable to Stutzmann herself, of course, for it is she who conducts the orchestra she founded in 2009. Despite some edgy tuning from the strings, they are with her at every turn. Lindsay Kemp

#### Honegger

König David

Devid Striesow narr Irm Hermann spkr
Narine Yeghiyan sop Rowan Hellier contr
Jan Remmers ten Junges Ensemble Berlin Chor;
Prometheus Ensemble Berlin / Frank Markowitsch
Rondeau Production (F) ROP6088 (72' • DDD)



König David? The world hasn't exactly been waiting for a German language

recording of this once-popular musicodramatic telling of the King David story that launched Arthur Honegger's career. Now that such a recording is here, it makes a case for itself in the original wind-band orchestration, early performances of which were presented in German translation of the René Morax text.

Honegger's 20th-century hybrid of Middle Eastern-influenced music, which doesn't so much dramatise the story as underscore points already made by the text, can sound, to modern ears, like Miklós Rózsa's much later film score to Ben-Hur, though the original wind band takes König David in a positive step away from those Hollywood associations. The piece has extra Stravinskian bite and primitivism, while also revealing the young Honegger flexing his compositional muscles in nearly every dramatically appropriate direction, even creating an effective Sprechstimme melodrama scene for witch and orchestra.

The dramatic momentum from conductor Frank Markowitsch, especially among the choral forces, counts for much in a score that feels almost terse to a fault. Vocal soloists Narine Yeghiyan, Rowan Hellier and Jan Remmers aren't the most distinctive personalities but certainly do the job, often managing Honegger's less than lyrical vocal lines with an ease eclipsing their recorded predecessors.

The deal-breaker here is the narrator – the dominant presence in a piece that's best heard in the language of its audience. And with these Berlin-based forces, the recording's drawing cards are screen star Devid Striesow in this central

role and actress Irm Hermann as an appropriately delirious witch. It's here that *König David* may lose more non-German listeners than usual.

After a fairly nuanced beginning, Striesow hits a high-rhetoric pitch that borders on the hysterical as the piece goes on – while also falling back on the same inflections so frequently that you really want him to stop long before he does. The composer's own recording had a more low-key narrator in Jean Hervé (Ducretet – nla) – a precedent followed by Charles Dutoit in his 1973 Erato recording (Apex, 1/72) with Jean Dessailly that uses the wind-band arrangement and has the vocal glamour of Christiane Eda-Pierre.

For English-speaking listeners, there's a curiously recommendable 1958 BBC broadcast artifact available on download from various places, conducted by Sir Malcolm Sargent and with a fine female narrator, Margaretta Scott, who sensibly doubles as the witch. David Patrick Stearns

#### Linjama

Die Geburt des Täufers	
Ursula Langmayr sop	Maria
Tuula Paavola contr	Elisabeth
Niall Chorell ten	Gabriel
Esa Ruuttunen bar	Zacharias

Soli Deo Gloria Chamber Orchestra / Juhani Lamminmäki

Alba (F) - ABCD370 (77' • DDD • T/t)



Jyrki Linjama (*b*1962), a pupil of Heininen, Rautavaara and Durkó, has become

increasingly drawn to church and sacred music lately. *Die Geburt des Täufers* ('The Birth of the Baptist') is a church opera in a prologue and three acts for four soloists and a tiny orchestra of nine players. Linjama composed it in 2010 for the Carinthian Summer Music Festival during his tenure as Composer-in-Residence.

The scenario is based on the biblical story of the conception and birth of John the Baptist, set from autumn to summer. After the brief, introductory and philosophical Prologue, the long first act deals with Elisabeth and Zacharias's anguish at their childlessness, Gabriel's annunciation and striking Zacharias dumb, and Elisabeth's joy at conceiving. In the briefer second act, Gabriel annunciates to the Virgin Mary, who then visits Elisabeth. In Act 3 the third John is named and Gabriel promises to Mary he will appear to Joseph. The opera ends in a unison rendition of Psalm 23.

The opera is beautifully sung by the four principals, Ursula Langmayr radiant as Mary, and Juhani Lamminmäki elicits some fine playing from the accompanying Soli Deo Gloria Chamber Orchestra. The atmosphere has fleeting reminiscences of the Britten church parables but, sadly, the music does not have sufficient potential to sustain the work's length; matters are not helped by its rhythmic turgidity. On stage in a simple, sympathetic setting, I doubt not that it would make a satisfying impression but heard solely as music – despite Alba's fine sound – it is not a work I feel inclined to return to. Guy Rickards

#### **Mozart**

Mitridate, re di Ponto	
Barry Banks ten	Mitridate
Miah Persson sop	Aspasia
Sophie Bevan sop	Sifare
Lawrence Zazzo counterten	Farnace
Klara Ek sop	Ismene
Robert Murray ten	Marzio
Anna Devin sop	Arbate

Orchestra of Classical Opera / Ian Page
Signum (M) (4) SIGCD400 (3h 44' • DDD • S/T/t)



The almost 15-yearold Mozart's first *opera seria* (Milan, 1770) was performed

22 times but not revived again until 1970. The Orchestra of Classical Opera play with admirable flexibility during the Overture, from the delicacy of the *Andante grazioso* to the energy of the ensuing *Presto*. From the outset, Ian Page nurtures a performance that crackles, beguiles, thrills and moves by turns exactly as Mozart's opera requires – and plenty of the credit must go to the expert continuo duo of Andrew Skidmore (cello) and Steven Devine (harpsichord), who ensure that the recitatives flow with theatrical awareness but without distracting fuss.

The tyrant Mitridate has extraordinary leaps hurling to the uppermost reaches of his voice, whether the music is designed to portray gentle catharsis upon arriving home safely from war ('Se di lauri il crine adorno', which took Mozart several attempts to satisfy the difficult tenor Guglielmo d'Ettore) or jealous shouts of 'perfidi' when condemning both of his sons to death ('Già di pietà mi spoglio'). At either emotional extreme, Barry Banks dispatches the fiendish demands of the role with impressive security and vividness. Sifare's 'Lungi da te, mio bene' portrays his juxtaposed feelings of bliss and melancholy: he has just realised Aspasia

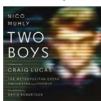
requites his love but she instructs him sorrowfully to stay away from her in order to preserve her honour (Gavin Edwards's poignant horn obbligato forms an exquisite dialogue with Sophie Bevan's Sifare). Miah Persson's compassionate artistry and vocal intelligence seem tailor-made for the scene in which Aspasia contemplates being forced to drink poison ('Pallid'ombre'). The seditious Farnace is the anti-hero who eventually turns into his nation's redeemer, evolving from the sneering arrogance and punchy defiance of his father in 'Venga pur, minacci e frema' (Lawrence Zazzo hints at dysfunctional torment) to a penitent regret of his treason and a desire to make amends in 'Già dagli occhi il velo è tolto'.

Klara Ek's supple singing as the jilted Ismene, Robert Murray's over-confident Roman tribune Marzio and Anna Devin's anxious Arbate round off a consistent cast without any weak links. Classical Opera's achievement is at least the equal of any version hitherto in the opera's distinguished discography, and Page also offers an entire extra album's worth of alternative versions of seven arias and a duet, most of them rejected by the fussy Milanese company of singers, who demanded that the malleable teenager scrap his first ideas and replace them with alternative settings more to their liking. **David Vickers** 

#### Muhlv

Two Boys	
Alice Coote mez	DI Anne Strawson
Paul Appleby ten	Brian
Jennifer Zetlan sop	Rebecca
Caitlin Lynch sop	Cynthia
Sandra Piques Eddy mez	Fiona
Judith Forst mez	Anne's Mum
Christopher Bolduc bar	Jake
Keith Miller bass-bar	Peter
Chorus and Orchestra of the Mo	etropolitan Opera,
New York / David Robertson	
N	

Nonesuch (9) (2) 7559 79560-2 (115' • DDD • S/T) Recorded live. October 21 & November 6, 2013



A number of contemporary operas have embraced the 21st century by taking

recent historical events as their starting point. American composer Nico Muhly's first full-scale work in this genre also draws from the recent past; but instead of engaging with political events or tracing a celebrity's self-destruction, *Two Boys* explores the lurid and seedy underbelly of chat rooms, webcams and internet scams.

Muhly's opera revolves around the attempted murder of Jake, a 12-year-old boy who has been stabbed in the dark corner of a shopping mall. The only other person found at the scene of the crime is the 'second' of the two boys, 16-year-old Brian. Detective Anne Strawson is called upon to investigate but Brian strenuously denies any wrongdoing during crossexamination. However, the more Strawson probes into the life of Brian, Jake, Jake's sister Rebecca, their shifty aunt Fiona, who works for the secret service, and the even shiftier gardener, Peter, the more she gets drawn into a complex and sinister tale of internet intrigue and deceit. On one level, Two Boys is a tale about the potentially inimical effects of internet use and abuse, but it is also an opera about the way in which social media has created a disoriented and disconnected generation, strangely dispossessed of compassionate thoughts and moral principles.

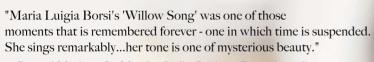
ENO's premiere in June 2011 elicited something of a mixed response. The choral sections appeared disconnected from the main thrust of the story and a subplot focusing on Strawson's relationship with her ageing mother – while providing light relief from the murder investigation itself – added little by way of dramatic depth.

Operas should not be judged according to first impressions, however, and Two Boys certainly gains from further listening. The best moments in Act 1 feature powerful duets between Rebecca (brilliantly characterised by Jennifer Zetlan) and Brian (Paul Appleby), or between Anne (Alice Coote, also excellent) and Brian, often punctuated by nervous ostinatos, pulsing polymetric rhythms and crunchy polytonal chords in the orchestra. The sound world of composers such as Glass, Adams and Andriessen is never far away but Muhly has harnessed these influences to his own ends, crafting a distinctive post-minimal style. Even those choral sections which seemed unsteady and insecure at the premiere are communicated here with far more presence, purpose and precision.

Muhly's technique of layering and superimposing lines against each other acts as a particularly powerful musical metaphor for the dark web and its never-ending babble of disembodied voices, as exposed most tellingly in the opera's dystopian ending. The recording, taken from the Metropolitan Opera's performances in October and November 2013, is not without its flaws, with quite a bit of ambient overspill coming from the stage during certain scene changes, but *Two Boys* is certainly worth a second (or even third) visit. Pwyllap Siôn

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Joe Law, Opera News (Madama Butterfly: Cincinnati Opera, 2014)



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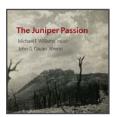












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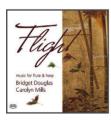
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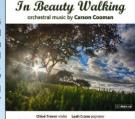


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#### Offenbach

Fantasio	
Sarah Connolly mez	Fantasio
Russell Braun bar	Prince of Mantua
Robert Murray ten	Marinoni
Brenda Rae sop	Princess Elsbeth
Victoria Simmonds mez	Flamel
Neal Davies bass-bar	Sparck
Brindley Sherratt bass	King of Bavaria
Aled Hall ten	Facio
Gavan Ring bar	Hartmann

Opera Rara Chorus; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / Sir Mark Elder Opera Rara (F) ② ORC51 (169' • DDD • S/T/t)



To say that *Fantasio* was one of Offenbach's more obscure operas would be putting it

mildly. A failure at the Opéra-Comique in 1872, a modest success at the Theater an der Wien, it seems to have disappeared from circulation until a lot of detective work led to the publication of the edition by Jean-Christophe Keck used for this recording and an associated performance in London last December.

The origins of the opera lie in a play by Alfred de Musset dating from 1834, reworked by Alfred's brother Paul for performance at the Comédie Française in 1866. The plot is distinctly odd. Elsbeth, daughter of the King of Bavaria, is due to be married for reasons of state to the Prince of Mantua. Elsbeth is mourning the death of Saint-Jean, the hunchbacked court jester. Fantasio, 'un simple bourgeois de Munich', adopts the jester's costume and gait in order to ingratiate himself with the princess. Meanwhile the prince, anxious to ascertain her true feelings, has exchanged clothes with Marinoni, his aide-de-camp. When the court assembles, Fantasio, perched in a tree, removes Marinoni's wig. The insult has the intended consequence of deferring the wedding. Elsbeth visits Fantasio in prison where, after some confusion, she returns his love and helps him escape. War threatens: Fantasio's suggestion that the rulers fight it out between them is nervously rejected by the prince, who withdraws his suit. Fantasio gets his princess, and is proclaimed the King of Fools.

In his booklet-note, Keck avers that the opera 'deserves to be called a masterpiece'. There are certainly some beautiful numbers, such as the duets for Elsbeth and Fantasio, and the orchestration is a joy: Fantasio's Ballade in Act 1 highlights the woodwind instruments in turn, from flutes to bassoons, and Elsbeth's Romance

features the clarinet and horn, magically played by Antony Pay and Roger Montgomery. Occasionally there are welcome reminders of past glories: the waltz in the finale of Act 2 recalls 'Un vil séducteur' from *La belle Hélène*, for instance. But the soufflé fails to rise. After the fall of Napoleon III and the Second Empire there was nothing for Offenbach to satirise, and it shows.

There are no reservations about the performers, though. The cast, led by Sarah Connolly and Brenda Rae, is first-rate, and Sir Mark Elder provides faultless direction. The spoken dialogue was recorded elsewhere but there is no discernible change in the acoustic: excellent sound, in fact, save for an over-prominent piccolo. I daresay I'm missing something, so do give this enterprising issue a try. Richard Lawrence

#### Rameau

#### Les Indes galantes

Valérie Gabail sopAmour	/Phani/Fatime/Zima
Stéphanie Révidat sop	Hébé/Emilie/Zaïre
Reinoud Van Mechelen ten	Carlos/Damor
François-Nicolas Geslot ten	Valère/Tacmas
Aimery Lefèvre bass	

......Bellone/Osman/Huascar/Ali/Adario
Sydney Fierro bass......Alvar

Le Choeur and La Simphonie du Marais / Hugo Reyne

Musiques à la Chabotterie ® ③ 605013 (3h 22' • DDD • S/T)

Recorded live at the Konzerthaus, Vienna, January 26 & 27, 2013



Rameau's opéraballet Les Indes galantes (mostly 1735) examines why

true love seems to have been abandoned in Europe and can now only be found in exotic faraway places, where the supposedly barbaric Turkish, Peruvian, Persian and Native American characters turn out to be more civilised than most of their European counterparts (there are a few notable contrary exceptions, such as the enlightened Spanish hero Carlos, who exposes the Inca priest Huascar's dastardly scheme to ensnare Phani). A new edition of the score by Hugo Reyne and Nicolas Sceaux is now freely available online, and it reinstates numerous passages that Rameau later cut, such as the full original earthquake music in 'The Incas of Peru', which the composer was forced to abridge because the performers objected; they also restore his original orchestrations, thus remedying the unreliable reorchestrated

Durand edition that misled trusting musicians for several generations.

Six core soloists perform all 17 roles in Revne's live recording made at Vienna's Konzerthaus in January 2013. Valérie Gabail sings Zima's triumphant song in praise of love and youth ('Regnez Plaisirs et Jeux', with trumpet, woodwind and timpani) with a full-bodied radiance and intelligence far beyond the coquettish mannerisms one sometimes encounters in other versions (although the Herculean approach to a concluding high D is a rare misstep). The highlight of the entrée 'The Flowers of Persia' is the sweetly balanced quartet 'Tendre amour' (albeit with the high tenor François-Nicolas Geslot slipping slightly under with some sustained repeated highest notes). The orchestra of La Simphonie du Marais play dances with charming élan but without the noise of actual steps (although one does hear page turns, creaking instruments and coughs from time to time). The thumping bass drum in the Pipe of Peace ceremony dance 'Les Sauvages' ensures that Rameau's evocation of the Louisiana Sioux has never seemed so clearly realised, and the concluding chaconne features excellent playing from the trumpets and woodwind. The comprehensive booklet includes the full libretto (albeit in French only), and Reyne's engaging essay includes detailed comments on Rameau's music, illustrations both iconographical and musical, and a detailed synopsis. From every point of view that matters, this is a special Ramellian achievement. David Vickers

#### **R Strauss**

IX Strauss	
Intermezzo	
Simone Schneider sop	Christine
Markus Eiche barRo	bert Storch
Martina Welschenbach sop	Anna
Martin Homrich tenBard	on Lummer
Michael Dries bass	Notary
Maria Bulgakova sop	His Wife
Brenden Gunnell ten	Stroh
Marc Kugel bass-barCommercial	Counsellor
Peter Schöne barLegal	Counsellor
Günter Missenhardt bass Chan	nber Singer
Sophie Mitterhuber sop	Resi
Brigitte Fassbaender spkrSp	ooken roles
Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer	
CPO 🖲 ② CPO777 901-2 (136' • DDD • T/	(t)
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whose attitudes to the composer were generally far from favourable, Strauss's 'bourgeois comedy' is among his most interesting and straightforwardly enjoyable works. It has not fared terribly well on disc, though, with Wolfgang Sawallisch's 1980 Munich studio recording for EMI (with Lucia Popp and Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau) the main exception. That recording is now available only in a big Warner box (without libretto – 5/14), making this new recording particularly welcome - doubly so, since for once CPO has included a full libretto and translation. The superfluous applause at the end of each act (the performance was taped in concert in 2011) is less welcome.

Ulf Schirmer's conducting is light on its feet but alive to the score's humour and tenderness, and he doesn't drive things forwards as much as Sawallisch occasionally does. The playing of his Munich orchestra is also excellent - the all-important orchestral interludes, showing Strauss at his most buoyantly virtuoso and inventive, are beautifully done.

Leading the cast, Simone Schneider is a terrific if unusually rich-voiced Christine. Now also a formidable Frau ohne Schatten Empress, the German soprano comes to the role from a different end of the Straussian spectrum to the more lyrical Popp or the soubrettish Hanny Stefek, Christine to Hermann Prey's Robert on Josef Keilberth's live Vienna set (Orfeo, A/08). But she has all the notes and is wonderful in the final scene's lyrical effusions. She also has charm, warmth and vitality, while the quality of her instrument saves the character from possible shrewishness.

I like Markus Eiche's Robert, too. Mellower than the rather hectoring, blustery Fischer-Dieskau but less mischievous than Prey, he nevertheless presents a highly sympathetic character, and the voice is pleasingly grainy. There's fine work from the rest of the cast, with the mellifluous Martin Homrich standing out as the dodgy Baron Lummer. Brigitte Fassbaender is delightful in the different spoken roles. In good, clear sound, this is an excellent, enjoyable set, and one that, in its way, might prove to be one of the most important releases of the Strauss year. **Hugo Shirley** 

A Tchaikowsky	STORES BUTTON DE
The Merchant of Venice	
Richard Angas bass	Duke of Venice
Christopher Ainslie counterten	Antonio
Charles Workman ten	Bassanio
Adrian Clarke bass	Salerio
Norman Patzke bass-baritone	Solanio
David Stout har	Gratiano

Jason Bridges ten	Lorenzo
Adrian Eröd bar	Shylock
Kathryn Lewek sop	Jessica
Magdalena Anna Hofmann sop	Portia
Verena Gunz mez	Nerissa
Hanna Herfurtner sop	A Boy

#### Prague Philharmonic Choir: Vienna Symphony Orchestra / Erik Nielsen

Stage director Keith Warner Video director Felix Breisach

EuroArts (F) 207 2708; (F) 207 2704 (160' + 50' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.0 • DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Extra feature: 'Journey to Bregenz - The Planning of an Opera' - a documentary by Mark Charles Recorded live at the Bregenz Festival 2013



It is a minor miracle that a score so well paced and characterised, so well written for its many voices, should be the first (and

only) opera of the Polish-born composer/ pianist who died in his adopted home of Britain in 1982 aged 46. Tchaikowsky was a virtuoso pianist, a sometime protégé of Stefan Askenase and Rubinstein, but a composer at heart with a flush of not overperformed works for orchestra and string quartet. Informed championship from Hans Keller was not enough in 1981 to persuade ENO to undertake the score although a member of their audition panel then, David Pountney, has mounted its belated premiere at his Bregenz Festival, hailing the work as 'the most important operatic interpretation of Shakespeare since the 19th century'.

More than just The Merchant of Venice's title and setting remind one that Britten's final Thomas Mann opera was an exact contemporary. Tchaikowsky's decidedly post-Romantic 20th-century score has clearly heard and absorbed the form and lyricism of a Britten influenced by Berg without being derivative of either. He proves as able a musical narrator as these two forerunners, moving along in gripping fashion a story which, with its pairs of characters, disguises and debates on love, turns out not unlike a darker Così fan tutte. (John O'Brien's libretto is faithful to the play's main intrigues while omitting its groundling comedy.) He also commands a musical palette wide enough to put dramatic space around Portia's 'The quality of mercy' soliloguy and encompass a vaudeville-style handling of the ensemble passages in the street outside Shylock's house or during the choosing of the caskets scene.

The production and its realisation here are extremely happy events. Scenes come

and go swiftly in between mobile trucks and walls - the bricks of Shylock's house are numbered bank strongboxes. Costumes are Edwardian – period enough to be historical in feel vet modern in movement and, aptly, the high noon of great Jewish international financiers. Cunning casting mixes German-speaking artists with excellent English - the feisty Portia/ Nerissa team, Adrian Eröd's beautifully balanced Shylock - and the more expected Brits and Americans as whom one used to call the gay young youth of Venice. Keith Warner handles all this onstage with a deft mix of the light (Gratiano dim and keen, Salerio and Solanio roving journalists) and the serious (Antonio's evident attraction to Bassanio and sadness at not being able to share the others' marital heterosexual bliss). There is real menace in the courtroom scene, presided over by the late Richard Angas's nicely equivocal Duke, when the obsession of Eröd's Shylock with his 'bond' wipes out the wit he showed earlier in the Rialto stock exchange scene and calls forth real sternness from Magdalena Anna Hofmann's Portia.

Playing, conducting and filming serve piece and production well; hugely recommended, and an event to which you may be tempted to return often. Mike Ashman

#### Verdi



Il trovatore Gaston Rivero ten... Anna Netrebko sop..... Leonora Plácido Domingo bar.....Count di Luna Marina Prudenskaya mez..... Azucena Adrian Sâmpetrean bass ......Ferrando Anna Lapkovskaja mez......

#### Staatskapelle Berlin / Daniel Barenboim

Stage director **Philipp Stölzl** 

DG (F) 2 073 5132GH: (F) 2 073 5133GH (145' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i • DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & PCM stereo • O • s)

Recorded live at the Staatsoper Berlin, December 2013



Here is a dilemma. Is the presence of Anna Netrebko and Plácido Domingo enough to justify a purchase, or does

Philipp Stölzl's childish production rule this DVD out of court? In the latest of her big Verdi soprano roles, Netrebko gives a completely authoritative performance. Although her shaping of Verdi's vocal lines is not especially individual, she has voice to spare and nothing sounds beyond her – not the Act 1 cabaletta (both verses, skilfully

negotiated), not the confrontation with the Conte di Luna (pulsating with drama and desperation), and certainly not her superconfident 'D'amor sull'ali rosee', crowned with high-class floated top notes. At this stage of his career Domingo is less well suited to the Conte di Luna than Verdi's 'older' baritone roles, such as Simon Boccanegra and Giorgio Germont. He sounds rather tired at the start but his still majestic tenor-baritone, boosted by an undimmed ability to command the stage, comes good by the end.

Stölzl's production is set in one corner of a white box, occasionally varied by projections on to the side walls but those are mostly too faint to make an effect on DVD. It seems that Stölzl sees *Il trovatore* as a crazed successor to the Italian *commedia dell'arte* tradition: Manrico is clearly Scaramouche, Azucena a china-doll mad lady, and the chorus jerk about like puppets. The challenge of *Il trovatore* is surely to get a potentially ludicrous opera to be taken seriously by a 21st-century audience. Stölzl is looking down the wrong end of the telescope.

The rest of the cast acquit themselves adequately. Gaston Rivero, the Manrico, does not possess the most ingratiating of tenor voices, primarily because of his heavy fast vibrato, but he has all the notes. Marina Prudenskaya, an Azucena of more soprano-ish timbre than most, lets fly uninhibitedly where it matters. Adrian Sâmpetrean is a strong Ferrando; Anna Lapkovskaja makes an impression as Ines, not least thanks to her three-tier beehive hairdo, in which a large bird seems to be nesting. Supported by high-quality playing from his Staatskapelle Berlin, Daniel Barenboim sounds more urgently engaged in the Verdi idiom than he was with Otello some years back. Those who want Netrebko at any cost may be willing to put up with Stölzl's production. Speaking personally, I don't see myself playing it again often, if at all. Richard Fairman

#### 'A Royal Trio'

Ariosti Coriolano - Spirate, o iniqui marmi...Voi d'un figlio tanto misero. Il naufragio vicino - Freme l'onda. Vespasiano - Overture Bononcini Crispo - Così stanco Pellegrino; Torrente che scende. Griselda - Per la gloria d'adorarvi. Muzio Scevola - Tigre piagata Handel Admeto - Sinfonia; Ballo di Larve; Orride larve...Chiudetevi, miei lumi. Flavio - Rompo i lacci. Giulio Cesare - Va tacito e nascosto. Ottone - Tanti affanni. Rodelinda - Vivi, tiranno, io t'ho scampato

G

La Nuova Musica / David Bates
Harmonia Mundi (E) \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ HMU80 7590
(78' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



'Some say, compar'd to Bononcini / That Mynheer Handel's but a Ninny. / Others

aver, that he to Handel / Is scarcely fit to hold a Candle.' Satirised in John Byrom's poem, the more-or-less friendly operatic rivalry between Handel and Bononcini was whipped up by their partisans into an acrimonious feud. Both composed prolifically for London's Royal Academy of Music in the early 1720s; then, as Bononcini's fortunes began to dip, the Academy engaged the Bolognese priestturned-composer Attilio Ariosti. Like the Handelian faction in the 1720s, we now take Handel's superiority for granted. Yet, as Lawrence Zazzo and David Bates's superbly responsive period band confirm, the two Italians were skilled operatic professionals whose best numbers could easily pass for Handel.

Music historian John Hawkins summed up Bononcini's style as 'tender, elegant and pathetic': epithets apt to the doleful aria from Crispo (with a touching - and touchingly played - cello solo) and the suave minuet song from Griselda. Zazzo's limpid delicacy, and control of nuance within a long-spun line, is as impressive as his bravura exuberance in Ariosti's 'shipwreck' aria, 'Freme l'onda'. Even finer is the sombre prison scene from Ariosti's Coriolano, admired by Rameau, no less. A natural theatre animal, Zazzo 'lives' each phase of the grieving accompanied recitative, always alive to the sound and meaning of the words, and phrases and colours eloquently in the aria that follows.

A minor gripe is the slightly haphazard ordering of items. Why, for instance, do we have a fizzing Sinfonia from Handel's Admeto between a Bononcini aria (from Muzio Scevola) and 'Vivi, tiranno' from Rodelinda? And Zazzo surely misses a trick by not including one of the arias Handel contributed to the collaborative Muzio Scevola. That said, I enjoyed this snapshot of London's operatic life almost without reservation. Zazzo and the players - not least the fabulous horns - have all the boldness and virtuoso panache one could wish for in the extrovert arias, culminating in a show-stopping 'Vivi, tiranno'. Even more memorable are the sorrowful and reflective numbers, not only the prison scene from Coriolano but also Ottone's despairing 'Tanti affani' and the 'sleep' aria from Admeto, sung and played with exquisite hushed tenderness. The breadth and expressive depth of these numbers, and

of the famous 'hunting' aria from *Giulio Cesare*, do indeed clinch Handel's superiority. But the gap between the great man and his operatic rivals is not as wide as history has decreed. **Richard Wigmore** 

#### 'St Petersburg'



Araia La forza dell'amore e dell'odio - Vado a morir. Seleuco - Pastor che a notte ombrosa Raupach Altsesta - Idu na smert; March; Razverzi pyos gortani, Iaya. Siroe, re di Persia - O placido il mare Dall'Oglio/Madonis De' miei figli (Prologue to Hasse's La clemenza di Tito) Manfredini Carlo Magno - A noi vivi, donna eccelsa; Fra' lacci tu mi credi; Non turbar que' vaghi rai Cimarosa La vergine del sole - Agitata in tante pene Cecilia Bartoli mez I Barocchisti / Diego Fasolis Decca ® 478 6767DH (78' • DDD • T/t)



The latest of Cecilia Bartoli's exuberant explorations of neglected areas of

17th- and 18th-century opera has journeyed north to St Petersburg and the archives of the Mariinsky Theatre to examine the fruits of attempts by three successive 18th-century Russian empresses - Anne, Elizabeth and Catherine the Great - to modernise the city's musical entertainments. 'Modernising', of course, meant 'Italianising', achieved by appointing Italian composers, singers and designers to the court opera. Famously, Catherine summoned at various times Galuppi, Traetta, Paisiello, Sarti, Cimarosa and Martin y Soler, but we get only one of those guys here, the emphasis instead being on the three less familiar Kapellmeisters employed by her predecessors in the years 1735-65: Francesco Araia, Hermann Raupach and Vincenzo Manfredini.

Anyone expecting from that a diet of thin, phoned-in Neapolitan fare will be in for a surprise. There is rich music here, and dramatic too. The arias, all from opere serie, are expansive in vocal expression and orchestral colour, and crackingly good to listen to too. Araia's 'Vado a morir' has a Venetian duskiness, his 'Pastor che a notte ombrosa' a placidly piping oboe encountering shivering violin figures suggestive of a palpitating heart; arias from Raupach's Altsesta, the first-ever opera in Russian, show Classical poise as Alceste sacrifices herself, and scintillating athleticism and dash as Hercules prepares to enter Hell to a charivari of trumpets and drums such as surely no Fury could withstand; and the two arias and a chorus from Manfredini's Carlo Magna include one in which the eponymous Charlemagne



The chorus of the Staatsoper Berlin in Philipp Stölzi's vividly coloured and costumed 2013 production of Verdi's II trovatore

dispenses mercy while flute notes drop as the gentle rain. The Cimarosa, from 1788 and with a clarinet obbligato, has a more High Classical combination of vocal virtuosity and lyrical grace.

Bartoli, as ever, is in complete technical command of this music, which in places is as challenging as you'll find at this period. It is pleasing to hear that the machine-gun attack that she has in the past applied to passagework has been moderated into something more fluid; but where before a certain over-intensity of tone has sometimes threatened to crush slighter music, these arias seem well able to stand up to it - and in any case, it is nothing to the vivid excitement brought to them by her tireless expressive commitment. The playing of I Barocchisti under Diego Fasolis, as on last year's Steffani arias disc (11/13), is brilliant, surging, ardent.

Bartoli's lavishly realised 'project' albums are regular treats. Proper research and thought goes into their selection and de luxe presentation, resulting in objects to be cherished and discoveries truly worthy of the making. Remember, it is only 15 years ago that she was performing this service for Vivaldi's 'forgotten' operas, and look what has happened to them!

Lindsay Kemp

#### 'Stella di Napoli'



Bellini Adelson e Salvini - Dopo l'oscuro nembo. I Capuleti e i Montecchi - Deh! tu, bell'anima Carafa Le nozze di Lammermoor - Oh, di sorte crudel Donizetti Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth - Par che mi dica ancora. Maria Stuarda - Deh! Tu di un'umile preghiera Mercadante La vestale - Se fino al cielo ascendere Pacini Saffo - Gran scena finale. Stella di Napoli - Ove t'aggiri, o barbaro Rossini Zelmira - Riedi al soglio Valentini II sonnambulo - Se il mar sommesso mormora

Joyce DiDonato mez Chorus and Orchestra of the Opéra de Lyon / Riccardo Minasi Erato 
© 2564 63656-2 (72' • DDD • T/t)



After her programme of Baroque arias in 'Drama Queens' (Virgin, 1/13), Joyce

DiDonato moves on a century to treat us to a fine selection of excerpts from 10 operas, seven of which were composed for Naples. It's good that the lesser-known contemporaries of Rossini get a look-in. Unfortunately the opening number, from Pacini's *Stella di Napoli*, is the kind of piece that gets ottocento opera a bad name. 'Receive the dying sigh my breast exhales'

sings Stella, chirruping away to a cheerful polonaise. A proper seriousness is established with Nelly's Romanza from Bellini's first opera, *Adelson e Salvini*: three strophic stanzas, beautifully embellished, with a telling switch to the major at the final cadence.

There's some lovely instrumental playing: harp and clarinet in the Carafa, and the glass harmonica part in Elisabetta al castello di Kenilworth played on a gently tinkling glockenspiel. The harp is heard in the latter, too, and in Mary Stuart's preghiera. Here DiDonato reappears in the role in which she triumphed at the Met (Erato DVD, 8/14). As there (and at Covent Garden last July), so here: warm tone, perfect control, a deeply sympathetic portrayal. The finale of Zelmira provides DiDonato with the opportunity of showing off her brilliantly executed coloratura, while her mezza voce at the start of Romeo's farewell to the supposedly dead Juliet in Bellini's opera is sustained to perfection. By far the longest number, at 14 minutes, is the closing scene of Pacini's Saffo. As the poetess prepares to throw herself off the cliff into the sea, DiDonato invests the music with a tragic grandeur. Full texts and translations but the dramatic situations are left largely unexplained. Richard Lawrence

## REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

## Romantic masterworks in concert

Weitblick continues to unearth fascinating recordings by the great maestros of the 20th century

he Weitblick label is proving a rich source of concert recordings from Sweden and Germany, all newly available in the UK, and even after a couple of weeks a major presence on my listening schedule.

I'd never previously thought of **Evgeni Svetlanov** as a Bruckner conductor but a version of the Ninth from March 1999 with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra vies with the older Celibidache for breadth, majesty and the sheer power of the bigger climaxes – especially the *Adagio*'s cataclysmic denouement.

A Bruckner Seventh with Eugen Jochum and the Munich Philharmonic dates from 20 years earlier but is scarcely less imposing and volatile than Jochum's Bruckner cycles on DG and EMI, with sensitively judged transitions and frequently rapt playing, especially from the strings. The ultimate impression here is of a master who is totally au fait with the music's architecture. Jochum is also at the helm (this time of the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin) for a remarkable performance of Brahms's Second Piano Concerto with Alicia de Larrocha (from June 1981), assertive, poetic and with an awesome level of technical control. The first movement in particular is mightily impressive.

When it comes to **Arturo Benedetti Michelangeli** in the 1960s, technical control is inevitably on the agenda but even so a 1969 performance of Beethoven's *Emperor*Concerto with the Swedish RSO under Celibidache is monumentally imposing, with superhuman trills, chords that resonate almost as powerfully as the orchestra and, towards the end of the first movement, some extraordinary tone-colouring. Only the forcefully outspoken slow movement might strike some as a little OTT.

The *Emperor* is in stereo whereas the accompanying Schumann Concerto (1967)

is in mono, another remarkable performance, even more individualistic (the first movement cadenza especially) but mesmerizing.

**Sergiu Celibidache** is otherwise represented by a pair of all-Beethoven programmes with the Swedish RSO, the best covering Symphonies Nos 5, 6 and 7, the other, Nos 2, 3, 4 and the *Leonore* Overture No 3. No excessively slow tempi to worry about here but a mass of internal detail to listen out for, with sensitive transitions and plenty of visceral excitement. Only the Second Symphony is in mono.

Some while ago Orfeo issued a 1982 ORF Radio relay of Smetana's *Má vlast* with the Vienna Radio Orchestra under **Lovro von Matačić** (8/12). Weitblick's transfer of this rugged and consistently spontaneous-sounding performance is set at a slightly higher playback level than Orfeo's but I wouldn't bother swapping.

I would, however, recommend investigating a 1981 Mahler Sixth by the Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra under **Giuseppe Sinopoli** which features one of the most gripping accounts of the finale that I have ever heard, especially the latter part, which works itself into a level of frenzy that even Bernstein never matched (at least not on the evidence of his surviving recordings). Dark, gritty, frequently propulsive and in the *Andante* candidly emotive, this is a Sixth that compares with the best.

A Vienna Symphony Orchestra Mahler Ninth under Gary Bertini (1985) enjoys vivid, close-set sound that suits Bertini's intense but direct approach to the score, the Rondo-Burleske's heartfelt central section resigned and evocative, the outer movements powerfully communicative, rather in the manner of Gielen and Rosbaud. The transfer throughout the series – and what a series it is! – is in general excellent.

#### THE RECORDINGS



**Bruckner** Sym No 9 **Swedish RSO / Svetlanov** Weitblick (F) SSS0121-2



**Bruckner** Sym No 7 **Munich PO / Jochum** Weitblick © SSSO089-2



Brahms Pf Conc No 2 Larrocha; Deutsches SO Berlin / Jochum Weitblick (F) SSSO097-2



Beethoven Pf Conc No 5 Schumann Pf Conc Michelangeli; Swedish RSO / Celibidache Weitblick © SSSO0130-2



**Beethoven** Syms Nos 5-7 **Swedish RSO / Celibidache** Weitblick (M) (2) SSSO0153/154-2



**Beethoven** Syms Nos 2-4 **Swedish RSO / Celibidache** Weitblick **(M) (2)** SSSO0151/152-2



Smetana Má vlast Vienna RSO / Matačić Weitblick (10) (2) SSSO084-2



Mahler Sym No 6 SWR Stuttgart RSO / Sinopoli Weitblick M ② SSS0109-2



Mahler Sym No 9 Vienna SO / Bertini Weitblick @ ② SSSOO81-2

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Evgeni Svetlanov, whose Bruckner Ninth with the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra is a revelation

## More from Weitblick

Back in September 1971 I attended a BBC Prom where, as I recall, Arvid Jansons (father of Mariss) conducted Shostakovich's Fifth and Tchaikovsky's Francesca da Rimini. 'Next best thing to Mravinsky' I thought at the time, though listening to Jansons four months earlier conduct the Staatskapelle Dresden in Tchaikovsky's Sixth as issued by Weitblick leaves a quite different impression. Granted, the mono sound is constricted but even so Jansons's view of the work comes across as considerably more heated than Mravinsky's, though in terms of the broader picture the two conductors follow a similar approach. Jansons makes the 'big tunes' in both the first and last movements positively cry and his handling of the first movement's development section fans the flames much as Mravinsky's does.

He also takes a relatively elegiac view of the second movement, not as painstakingly shaped as Mravinsky's but even more soulful. Although extremely well played by an orchestra with a notably warm tonal profile, Jansons's Pathétique differs from Mravinsky's in sounding more openly emotive, more dangerous and less concerned with keeping its powder dry. Less an aloof aristocrat, I suppose you could say, more an ardent communicator with a message to convey, hand-on-heart. There's a fill-up by Karl Friedrich, a manically active Rondo leggiero for strings which calls on just about every trick available to bow and fingers. Fun and I would have thought well worth considering as a possible encore by a crack string ensemble.

#### THE RECORDING



Tchaikovsky Sym No 6 Friedrich Rondo leggiero Staatskapelle Dresden / Arvid Jansons Weitblick (M. (2) SSSO128-2

### The Amadeus Quartet

The third instalment of Audite's **Amadeus Quartet** recordings, all of them taken from Berlin RIAS broadcasts and dating from the period 1951-57, covers works already available in the Quartet's capable hands, principally in later (stereo) recordings available from DG. Comparisons reveal an impressive level of interpretative consistency, more spontaneous early on perhaps, and with most principal first-movement repeats omitted.

Most of the differences concern the sound quality, which on these RIAS tapes is appealingly intimate. Take Quartet No 18, K464, the opening *Allegro*, where, as presented here, dynamic contrasts tell with expressive impact but on DG, where the balance suggests listening from the rear of a medium-size concert hall, the effect is less immediate. In this instance the stereo 'pay-off' is minimal compared to the advantage of having the players sound as if they're in the room with you. And with playing as musically sympathetic and stylistically 'on the button' as we're offered here, who can complain?

Viewed overall there is some extraordinarily beautiful playing on offer: the heart-stopping *Adagio* from the Quintet in D major, K593, with Cecil Aronowitz, for example. The opening of the C major

Quintet, K515, is perfection, an amiable but lively *Allegro* with a spring to its step, while the dialogue with Aronowitz in the *Andante* could hardly be bettered. And then there's the tragic *Adagio* that opens the finale of the G minor Quintet, K516, so full of implied regret. The performance of the Clarinet Quintet with Heinrich Geuser is another highlight. I'm not suggesting you replace your DG versions but you could profitably use these marvellous recordings as musically nourishing supplements to them. Superb transfers.

#### THE RECORDING



Mozart Stg Qts Nos 14, 15, 18, 19 & 21-23. Stg Qnts Nos 3-6
Cecil Aronowitz va Heinrich
Geuser cl Amadeus Quartet
Audite M S AUDITE21 427

### Beecham's Mozart

Choosing between pre- and post-war Mozart from **Sir Thomas Beecham** can lead to heated debate. Many prefer the swift and incisively played pre-war LPO recordings but my penchant for the 1950s American Columbia RPO sessions is clinched principally by the expressively voiced 1950 *Jupiter* that Pristine has just put out in an 'ambient' transfer, a move that works rather better on the accompanying 1954 Symphony No 40, which as presented does sound as if it could be an early stereo recording (the Bassoon Concerto with Gwydion Brooke, also included, is indeed in stereo).

Both of the last symphonies sound weightier than we're used to nowadays, the Jupiter featuring a gravely beautiful Andante cantabile and a jog-trotting Minuet that at almost six minutes must be among the slowest on disc. But what charm! The principal attraction here is in the way Beecham phrases the music (especially the slow movements) and the sheer quality of his orchestral soloists. To say that nothing today is remotely comparable sounds like a put-down. I don't mean it quite like that...but I'll say it all the same.

As a bonus you can hear the Beecham Symphony Orchestra as of 1912 firing on all cylinders in *The Marriage of Figaro* Overture and sounding pretty amazing, given the recording's great age.

#### THE RECORDING



Mozart Syms Nos 40-41.
Bn Conc

Gwydion Brooke *bn* RPO; Beecham SO / Beecham Pristine Classical M PASC415

# Books



## Philip Clark reviews a blockbuster new biography of Beethoven:

'Swafford has written a book that knows the audience it wants to appeal to – probably more Classic FM than Radio 3'

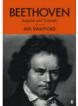


## Richard Whitehouse reads a volume devoted to David Matthews:

'A finely assembled and engrossing tribute to a composer whose creativity shows no signs of abating'

#### **Beethoven**

Anguish and Triumph By Jan Swafford Faber & Faber, HB, 1104pp, £30 ISBN 978-0-618-05474-9



Not being a regular, or indeed an irregular, reader of the *Daily Mail*, I couldn't tell you how many

music biographies Britain's second bestselling newspaper reviews, but their in-house review of American composer/ writer Ian Swafford's new biography of Ludwig van Beethoven – or as they label him 'Ludwig the brothel creeper' – is a corker. Beethoven writes strange music and goes deaf; suffers constant diarrhoea; is arrested ('more than once') because he looks like a tramp; is caught 'on a sofa' showing one of his female pupils a little more than second species counterpoint all while satisfying his desires in Vienna's brothels. Only in the penultimate paragraph do we learn that Beethoven 'stretched the bounds of music and of performance'. But then again this whole review is undermined from the start as the paper refers to Swafford as 'Jane Swafford'. In Daily Mailland, clearly, Jan is no name for a man.

And Beethoven: Anguish and Triumph is undoubtedly an odd hybrid. Swafford, being a composer himself, is very strong on nuts-and-bolts musical analysis (often coming complete with music examples); but the jolt between those musical insights and his chatty, tabloid journalese can sit uncomfortably on the page. I haven't read Swafford's comparably ambitious and lengthy biography of Brahms but his Charles Ives book didn't make me feel queasy about its style. Was pressure put on Swafford to produce a block/bonkbuster biography - more Jilly than Barry Cooper? Either way, you can see why Daily Mail HQ chose to commission a review of this book rather than, say, John Eliot Gardiner's scholarly JS Bach biography.

These are interesting times for Beethoven scholarship. Lewis Lockwood's Beethoven: The Music and the Life (2003) is the sort of music biography you could safely take home to meet your mother: flawlessly researched, with any mention of Viennese knocking-shops discreetly redacted, and written with a moderately colourless but innate authority. Sitting at the other end of the spectrum is John Suchet's hammy retelling of Beethoven's life, with sentiment woven into every sentence like he has taken shares in mawkishness, a book that reads like a sequence of those 'and finally' headlines that Suchet was duty-bound to enthusiastically bark during his days as a newsreader.

This book slots neatly between the two but already feels decidedly antediluvian. Swafford's Beethoven, unlike Gardiner's objectified Bach, is the very definition of a romanticised hero, a man who strolls through the countryside jotting down sketches for a new symphony - while turgid descriptions of Beethoven's funeral come with more than a hint of Dan Brown. In a world where Michael Broyles's strikingly brilliant and original Beethoven in America has already mapped out urgent new terrain for Beethoven's place in the modern world - Broyles's book only starts in 1827, the year of LvB's death, and tells us about his music by tracing its journey through the 20th century – Swafford is reinventing the gaslight.

But gaslights are charming; and, despite my misgivings, I don't regret carrying this enormous tome around for a few weeks and I'm pleased I stuck it to the end. When discussing Beethoven's Piano Sonata No 7, Swafford tells us 'in terms philosophical and psychological...the material of comedy and tragedy is the same, joy and suffering are made of the same things'. And thoughts like that make me warm to the author. True enough, this is nothing we don't already know - as Mel Brooks tells us, 'tragedy is when I cut my finger, comedy is when you fall down an open sewer and die' - but Swafford's musicianly sensibility rarely lets him down.

If the picture Swafford conjures up of the wild-haired, bordello-stalking and socially awkward Beethoven can feel frantically over-marinated in existing mythology, his sensitive musical analysis adds necessary light and shade. The opening motif of Beethoven's Fifth Symphony - da-da-dadah – is compared with the beginning of his Fourth Piano Concerto. The same rhythmic itch feeds both works, in the symphony becoming a tool of harmonic rupture and in the concerto expressing something divinely tender, a glimpse of heaven itself - therein the anguish weighing against the triumph, I suppose. Swafford has written a book that knows the audience it wants to appeal to - probably more Classic FM than Radio 3. Elsewhere authors like Michael Broyles are unpicking the mythology that Swafford wallows in; but anyone looking for a wallow need search no further. Philip Clark

#### **David Matthews**

Essays, Tributes and Criticism
Edited by Thomas Hyde
Plumbago Books, HB/PB, 320pp, £45/£15.99
ISBN 978-0-956-60076-9



The recorded coverage of David Matthews has become one of the most significant aspects of British

contemporary music this past decade, confirming his substantial output as having few equals in terms of its eliding of tradition and innovation with an assurance matched by few of his peers – British or otherwise. That he remains a still underestimated figure (though no one should underestimate the principled tenacity with which Matthews has fought the corner of classical composers, notably their relevance in what is an increasingly indifferent and often hostile era) reflects his status as a composer who has strategically avoided both modernist and populist traits, intent rather on pursuing a creative path which has

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Underestimated figure: the music of the British composer David Matthews is examined and appraised in a new book of essays, tributes and criticism

gained in expressive depth as surely as it has gained in formal (and, the composer would doubtless attest, tonal) clarity.

Issued to mark his 70th birthday, the present book is the first to be devoted to his music and its symposium format surveys the extent of Matthews's achievement not only in composition. Thus the first section takes in selected essays such as underline the breadth of his concerns - including numerous book reviews (Matthews has long been a mainstay of the Times Literary Supplement) and thoughts on those who helped shape his own identity. While Matthews on himself needs be taken advisedly (almost by definition, composers are seldom their own best judges, however well-reasoned their assessments might be), his observations as to working with Deryck Cooke on the latter's performing version of Mahler's Tenth Symphony, or of his visiting Mahler's birthplace and formative environs in what was then an inaccessible corner of communist Czechoslovakia, come as a salutary reminder of the composer's still recent rise to eminence; while those on the Sibelius tradition (as has latterly come to the fore in his own symphonic writing) or on Britten's late works underline the crucialness of such nominally disparate sources to the all-round richness of Matthews's own music. As the author of surely the best introductory monographs on both Britten and Tippett, and one able

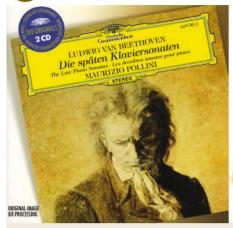
to evaluate the very different achievements of such as Berthold Goldschmidt or Bob Dylan, Matthews could have been (but fortunately has chosen otherwise) as substantive a writer as he is a composer.

After a second section which consists of tributes ranging from Paul McCartney's breezy salutation to the late Peter Sculthorpe's thoughtful reminiscences on their collaborations 'down under', as well as musical miniatures by composers including Judith Weir and James Francis Brown, the third and longest section has a range of critical evaluations. The late Malcolm MacDonald surveys the extent of Matthews's output in typically perceptive terms, while Arnold Whittall examines the Sixth and Seventh Symphonies with an objectivity and finesse absent from more partisan commentaries. Edward Venn traces the evolution of Matthews's thinking through the single-movement format of four of the symphonies, then Geraint Lewis provides a more informal yet highly pertinent overview of the symphonic poems and concertos. By his own admission a recent convert to Matthews, Hugh Wood casts an insightful and not uncritical eye over the Eleventh and Twelfth String Quartets – as well as a retrospective glance at the Third which he (rightly) considers to be an unacknowledged masterpiece. Finally, Thomas Hyde - who has edited this book's content with astute

thoroughness – considers the function of melody and its corresponding context on a composer whose concern for what he himself terms the vernacular has continued to inform his thinking in ever more focused and productive ways.

As an irreverent though by no means irrelevant envoi, Frank Ward brings his connoisseurship of wine to bear on the individual characters of each of Matthews's seven symphonies (though one wonders if Australasian rather than French and a solitary Austrian wine might have been even more appropriate). The volume is rounded off with a list of selected works (omitting just a handful of early opuses and almost all of his numerous arrangements), a not quite complete discography (inevitable given the rapidity with which new recordings have been appearing) and a bibliography of Matthews's writings the more valuable now that an increasing number of articles and reviews from however far back can be accessed online. It amounts to a finely assembled and engrossing tribute to a composer whose creativity shows no signs of abating (his Eighth Symphony is due to be premiered in Manchester next spring), and that wears its academic credentials with deftness and not a little understatement. As such, it could scarcely be a better complement to the vitality of Matthews's music - never more needed than now. Richard Whitehouse

# Classics RECONSIDERED





Critics **Jed Distler** and **Harriet Smith** revisit Pollini's recording on DG of Beethoven's Hammerklavier Sonata – a true classic of recorded piano music, which won a Gramophone Award



#### **Beethoven**

Piano Sonata No 29, Op 106, 'Hammerklavier' **Maurizio Pollini** of

DG S 2 449 7402

Make no mistake, this is playing of the highest order of mastery. Indeed, I am not sure that Pollini's account of the *Hammerklavier* is not the most impressive currently before the public, though the instant such thoughts are penned, the noble performances of Eschenbach, Arrau, Brendel and Ashkenazy spring to mind. Yet not even beside such giants as these as well as Solomon, Kempff and

perhaps even Schnabel does Pollini's achievement pale.

If Schnabel's *Hammerklavier* was not one of the triumphs of his pioneering cycle, its surface roughness worked in its favour in that the listener was never distracted from the spirit by the beauty of the letter. Pollini's account is simply staggering, for if there are incidental details which are more tellingly illuminated by other masters, no performance is more perfect than this new version. Superb rhythmic grip, sensitivity to line and gradation of tone, a masterly control of the long paragraph; all these are

features of this remarkable reading. In the slow movement the sublime outpouring of lyrical feeling beginning at bar 27 shows Pollini's peerless sense of line and eloquence of spirit, though memories of Arrau who fashions this passage with great poetry are not banished. John Ogdon's account has a splendidly withdrawn feeling at this point and a raptness and tranquillity that I greatly admire. No one, however, quite matches Pollini's stunning finale: its strength and controlled power silence criticism. There is no doubt, I think, that this is great piano-playing. **Robert Layton** (1/78)

**Jed Distler** When it first appeared 35 years ago, Maurizio Pollini's Hammerklavier got rave reviews nearly everywhere, and quickly became the Beethoven Bible among pianists aspiring to master this sonata's imposing and substantial challenges. Rehearing the opening movement, I notice again the gaunt and impeccably focused sonority (more alluring and nuanced in softer passages, however), and the stern attention to articulation and dynamics. Pollini's rock-steady yet never rigid pulse and expressive economy moves the music steadily forward, so much so that you don't really notice that the basic tempo is quite moderate in relation to Beethoven's rather optimistic metronome marking. Notice, too, the fugal development section's knotty double notes in dotted rhythms so firmly delineated and controlled with little help from the pedal. In the sequence of upward broken fifths and sixths just prior to the recapitulation, Pollini opts for the 'misprint masterstroke' A-sharp famously cited by Charles Rosen in his book The Classical Style, rather than the more logical yet less quirky A-natural that Alfred Brendel and Wilhelm Kempff favoured.

Harriet Smith You never go to Pollini for beauty of sound, do you, and the upper register in particular sounds pretty cranky today, especially at moments such as the high-lying right-hand chords against broken octaves in the left hand near the end of the exposition. I'd also take issue with whether his cantabile is ever truly that. But what continues to stun me about this reading (and stun is an apt description) is Pollini's clarity of vision, the way that he observes Beethoven's little ritenutos and dynamic shifts religiously but forms them into such a coherent whole. This is particularly compelling in the development, to my mind, where you never feel - as you do with some - that he's getting anywhere near the limits of his technique. He just carries you through it in a way that happens in the best live performances. Also striking is his almost superhuman control of the dynamic extremes in the coda. But I do come away from this reading wondering if it's manic enough: more Mies van der Rohe than Antoni Gaudí...

**JD** I beg to differ in regard to Pollini's *cantabile*, as we'll see in a moment, but to my

ears it's the Scherzo that's not quite 'manic' enough, although I'd use the word 'playful' instead. While Pollini's dotted rhythms in the main theme yield to no one for atomic accuracy, the music's sly asymmetry needs a lighter touch and more variety of inflection than the pianist is willing to concede. Furthermore, his smooth and utterly even handling of the Trio's opening B flat minor section, with its evocations of the Eroica Symphony first movement theme, plays down the cross-rhythmic writing's intended disorientation (so you think you know where the downbeat is, ha ha ha!). Pollini waits a hair too long before launching into the Presto; it must immediately emerge from seemingly out of nowhere. Yes, there's a fermata right before the upward Prestissimo F major scale, but Pollini waits a tad too long, and, as a consequence, the scale sounds like a virtuosic afterthought, rather than the shocking climax that pianists such as Anton Kuerti and, more recently, Alessio Bax make it out to be.

**HS** Or the remarkable Igor Levit, come to that, who also gets that scale just right and who plays up the instability of this

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movement without ever sounding self-conscious. But I keep finding myself turning back to Richard Goode here, too: in this movement he finds more impishness than most – and he judges the cross-rhythms of the trio to a nicety. He's also brilliantly tongue-in-cheek in the B flat/B natural duel just before the end of the movement. Alongside that, Pollini is the straight man, perhaps lacking in anarchy.

Where Pollini is towering, though, is in his clarity of thought and supreme intelligence; in a similar way to Boulez. And that's certainly the case in the fugal finale - it's subjected to playing of almost forensic brilliance. None of the passages that can become murky are allowed to remain in the shadows here. But he also finds real tenderness at key moments such as the new theme (Tovey's 'still, small voice', at 8'03") which Beethoven marks sempre dolce, and which has such restraint, such purity in Pollini's hands, all the more powerful for the way it is then subsumed so relentlessly by the main fugue subject and the marcato countersubject.

JD Any pianist would be happy to claim the steel-edged assurance of Pollini's fugue (or Ashkenazy's similarly conceived 1966 recording). But where's the light and shade, where's the variety of voicing, where's the characterisation we get from Arrau's large-scaled dynamism and amazingly pliable technique. These qualities abound in Peter Serkin's much faster, jazzier, more ingenuously contoured and nuanced reading, both here and in the first three movements on a long-out-of-print 1986 Pro-Arte on a modern Steinway (not his earlier Graf fortepiano traversal).

The *Largo* introduction's interruptions and transitions ought to sound improvised, yet a few telling details give Pollini away: prosaic accents in the canonic *Vivace* passage, and an ever-so-tiny breath pause right before the *Prestissimo* that dissipates the impact of that climatic *fortissimo* A major chord. Granted, these are picky considerations, yet they're all the more noticeable in light of Pollini's unquestionable strengths.

Believe it or not, it is in the *Adagio* sostenuto where Pollini's cognisance of Classical style, masterful finger legato, and considerable tonal resources mesmerizingly coalesce. There are so many examples to back this up, but listen first to the opening bars: the carefully balanced chords and shapely bass lines, the seamlessly subtle dynamic gradations say it all. Whereas some pianists arguably Chopinise the increasingly decorative right hand cantilenas (Eschenbach and Lucchesini, for instance), Pollini finds comparable colour by taking Beethoven's directives regarding tempo, expression and pedalling on faith.

**HS** I'm afraid I take issue with the notion of Pollini as 'prosaic' at any point in this sonata, even in that brief Vivace passage. But isn't it fascinating the way that you can return to an interpretation and find you're captivated by different aspects from before? And the way two people can hear the same performance but be gripped by different parts of it – that's what makes our job endlessly interesting! Because to my mind, the slow movement is the one thing where I really come away wanting more. It's not down to a matter of 'Chopinising', or being more blatantly emotive, but others reveal more heart. Perhaps I find it lacking here because I've got Solomon in my head, who, though he doesn't necessarily have all the answers in the other movements, does take the music to a level of transcendence that I don't find with Pollini. What I like about Pollini's reading is his pacing of it, which is as unerring here as it is in the remainder of the sonata (and sufficiently so that, as you pointed out earlier, the relatively slow tempo for the opening movement doesn't feel sluggish). But ultimately I'm awestruck by the way he plays this, rather than moved. But there's no getting away from it: this does still stack up as one of the classic Hammerklaviers, if not the last word on the matter. 6

The last CD in Pollini's Beethoven sonata cycle (Nos 16-20, DG 479 4325) is released in November, along with the whole cycle in one box

# THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

# Double bass concertos

Many composers fail to engage fully with the double bass, therefore undermining its potential as a hugely expressive instrument. **Philip Clark** picks 10 pieces that oppose this tendency and recommends recordings

New York bass player and composer, once lifted his instrument up from the floor mid-gig and held it like a saxophone. He felt that the vibrations passing between the frame of the instrument and his body were being short-circuited by the bass touching the floor. 'Every string instrument in the world is inside that bass,' Parker once told me. 'Koto sounds, guitar sounds, banjo sounds – there are as many sounds in that bass as there are bass players.'

Although Parker's experience was born of a particular moment in time, bass players typically talk about the relationship they share with their instruments in explicitly physical, tactile terms. From Bertram Turetzky and Gary Karr, to bassists of more recent vintage such as Robert Black, Mark Dresser and Chi-chi Nwanoku, the question has always been what to play – and composers who fail to grapple creatively with the inner life of the bass, and respond with what amount to cello concertos lying in the wrong octave, attract nothing but scorn. Such bass-ist attitudes are unacceptable.

Carl Ditters von Dittersdorf and Franz Anton Hoffmeister wrote concertos for double bass that conform to the 18th-century archetype, pieces that could have been easily conceived for other solo instruments. But the 10 stylistically distinct pieces selected here all take the bass on its own terms, their composers understanding the scope of the instrument's expressive potentialities. The bass can be a chameleon, as Parker reminds us, but understanding its capacity for illusion requires a deep understanding of the thing itself – its registral colours; its fire-source. **©** 



Serge Koussevitzky: the one-time double bass player understood the requirements for a concerto for his instrument

PHOTOGRAPHY: TULLY POTTER COLLECTION



🔟 Serge Koussevitzky **Double Bass Concerto** Stefano Sciascia db Orchestra Antonio Salieri Newton Classics (B) (2) 8802200

Conductor (Boston SO) and occasional composer Koussevitzky began his professional life as a double bass player, and the concerto he wrote in 1905 typifies the best way to approach writing one for double bass: the piece grows from his demonstrative understanding of the instrument, rather than being an attempt to impose an existing structure upon it. The melodic material is generic Russian: Tchaikovsky, Rachmaninov, Mussorgsky; but it's a soulful score of high musical intelligence.



Domenico Dragonetti **Double Bass Concerto in G** Ubaldo Fioravanti db Padua and Veneto Orchestra / 🚟 Claudio Martignon

Dvnamic (F) CDS133

Dragonetti was the man that Beethoven came to when seeking counsel about the double bass, and his advice was unwavering - it has a sound world of its own. This two-movement concerto, written in 1830, shows how deeply he heard inside his instrument. The opening Adagio has near-operatic splendour, the bass's long singsong lines put in a duologue with the orchestra. A Mozartian Allegretto is a playful tease.



 🔞 Hans Werner Henze **Double Bass Concerto** Garv Karr db ECO / Hans Werner Henze

In 1966, Henze wrote a concerto for the leading US bassist Gary Karr, and it's a mesmerising work. The conventional relationship between soloist and orchestra is broadly preserved, and it's noticeable that Henze largely avoids the lower end of the instrument; paradoxically, the general tessitura of the piece lies in the orchestral mid-to-high range, with the bass inhabiting its rich cantabile midriff and the

orchestra correspondingly nudged upstream.



🕡 Kalevi Abo **Double Bass Concerto** Eero Munter db Lahti SO / Jaakko Kuusisto BIS (F) 🥰 BIS1866

The concerto by Finnish composer Aho is more of an 'unconcerto' - a secret, hard-to-pin-down world revealing more of itself only gradually and we're all invited to eavesdrop. This clandestine journey inside sound is symbolised by Aho's purposeful entrapment of extended harmonics and long passages of ambling pizzicatos. The Misterioso puts you in mind of Bartók's night music, and the Presto remains gesturally busy yet harmonically motionless. Unusual vision; compositional clarity.



6 Peter Maxwell Davies Strathclyde Concerto No 7 Duncan McTier db SCO / Peter Maxwell Davies Naxos (B) 8 572355 (9/94R)

Davies's Strathclyde Concerto No 7, for double bass and chamber orchestra, written in 1992, perhaps tries too hard to persuade you that composing a double bass concerto is no sweat. The Lento establishes an air of quiet contentment, the bass enjoying the serene vistas. When the mood turns dark (as it must), Davies locks the bass into its sober low register, where the orchestra are sitting too: monochrome textures result. A noble failure.



5 Einojubani Rautavaara Angel of Dusk Esko Laine db Tapiola

Sinfonietta / Jean-Jacques Kantorow BIS (F) BIS910 (8/98)

Rautavaara called his Seventh Symphony Angel of Light, and if the dusky subtitle of his corresponding piece for double bass and orchestra implies darkness and mist then the reality is different. It's a long listen, clocking in at just under 30' - but Rautavaara uses the full arsenal of bass techniques and colours to keep the interest flowing. Internal dialogues between lyrical bowed passages and spiky pizzicato work trickle down inside the orchestral figurations.



4 Klaus Huber Erinnere dich an G Johannes Nied db Basle SO / Jürg Wyttenbach Accord (F) 204532 (nla)

Swiss composer Huber works with the double bass by changing it: the fourth string is tuned a minor third lower and the first string is nudged a semitone higher, allowing access to hitherto secreted harmonics. The bassist produces outlandish glissandos, block chords that would challenge a keyboard player and unusually resonating pizzicatos. Underlying the work is a theologian's text about the nature of suffering. This performance is currently available on YouTube.



Mauricio Kagel

Soloists incl **Georg Nothdorf** db / Mauricio Kagel Neos (F) (6) 11060 (7/11)

A concerto? Not exactly, but Kagel's 1960 Sonant tells us lots about double bass lore. It comes from a sequence of works in which Kagel explored the physicality and theatre of performance: players mime intricately notated passages (and might occasionally knock their instruments by mistake) or create intricate patterns guided only by symbols and graphic indications. Nothdorf makes his presence felt in a piece that moves dramatically on the fly, like a great improvisation.



Gavin Bryars **Double Bass Concerto:** Farewell to St Petersburg Daniel Nix db Estonian National Male Choir;

Pärnu Town Orchestra / Kaspars Putnins GB Records © BCGBCD11

Bryars used to be an improviser (with the Joseph Holbrooke Trio), but has since reinvented himself as a composer. His composed music can be rather nondescript, but the double bass pumps like a heart at the centre of this extraordinary piece. The score is fixed around ostinatos and the mantras of drums and bells, about which the bass meanders like a lonely voice trying to find solace.





## Nikos Skalkottas Double Bass Concerto

Vassilis Papavassiliou db Iceland SO / Nikos Christodoulou BIS © BIS954 (7/99)

Stranded passportless in his native Athens, having fallen out with his teacher Schoenberg, Skalkottas decides to write a Double Bass Concerto - just what's needed to reverse his fortunes. His vision in this work (1942) is prescient: Xenakis lurks around the corner. A hyperactive orchestral preamble leads to an all-seeing cadenza, the soloist beginning up high and taking a tumble to the bottom register via hectic, whirlpool figurations. The microscopic

timbral details of the second movement revisit Schoenberg's Klangfarbenmelodie ideals; but a foot-stamping folksy finale shows Skalkottas could flirt with the vernacular, too.

Follow Gramophone at Qobuz to listen to a selection of complete recordings from Philip Clark's Specialist's Guide survey



# THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

# Benjamin Britten's Venetian swansong – his Third Quartet

Although his **String Quartet No 3** was first heard in his native Suffolk shortly after his death in 1976, Britten's final masterpiece was partly written in Venice. **Geraint Lewis** explores a rich harvest of recordings

hen the members of the Amadeus Quartet got up to take their bow after giving the world premiere of Benjamin Britten's String Quartet No 3, Op 94, at the Maltings Concert Hall in Snape on December 19, 1976, the applause was particularly warm and heartfelt. But there was a very significant and poignant absence from the famous Directors' Box high up on a wall in the beautifully converted Suffolk hall – the composer himself. He died on December 4 and was buried three days later just up the coast at Aldeburgh Parish Church, with great artists from all over the world in attendance. It was even reported that the Queen had sent a private and personal message of condolence to the composer's partner, the tenor Peter Pears, in whose arms he had died. With his passing so fresh in everyone's minds, it seemed somehow uncanny that his local friends (as well as the wider world eavesdropping on BBC Radio 3) were now gathered again to hear his last words – from beyond the grave.

Six months earlier there had been much excitement, and some controversy, when on June 12 it was announced that the composer had accepted a life peerage in the Queen's Birthday Honours, thus becoming Baron Britten of Aldeburgh just in time for the 1976 Aldeburgh Festival. In 1973 Britten had missed the festival – and the first performances there of his opera *Death in Venice* – while recovering from a major heart operation, and his slow recovery since had been a

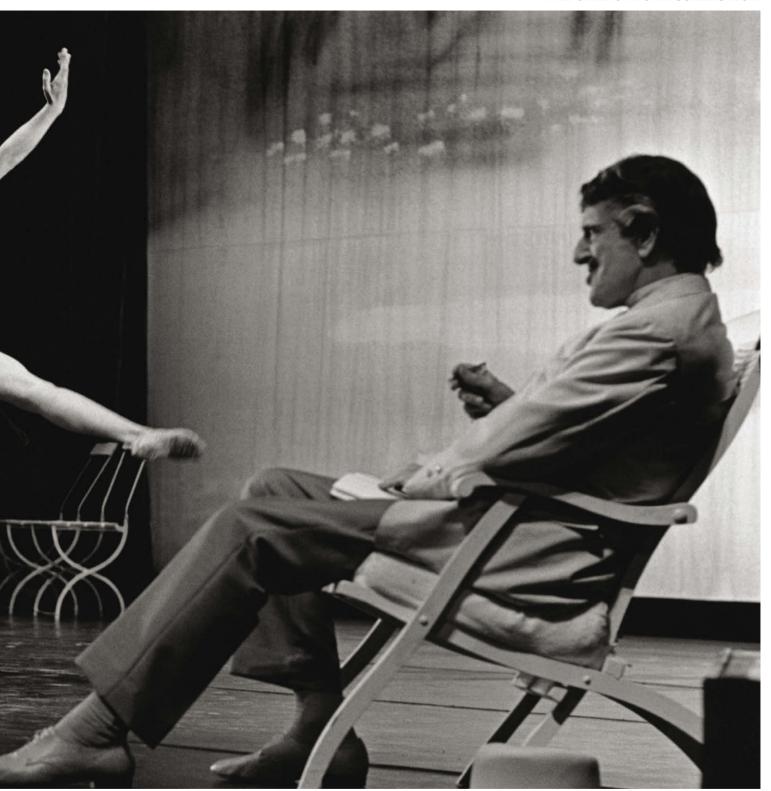
matter of speculation and considerable public concern. Meeting Peter Pears after the public premiere of A Birthday Hansel, Op 92, at the Cardiff Festival on March 19, 1976, I asked, as a naive teenager, if there would be, hopefully, another great opera before too long. With a slow smile covering a look of haunting sadness he said, very simply, 'No, nothing like that ever again,' but taking me aside went on to demonstrate on a nearby table how, unable now to move his right arm very far up the manuscript paper, Britten was working on 'much smaller things, some songs, a cantata – I think for Janet Baker – and, oh yes, a new quartet for the Amadeus'. A tantalising glimpse of great works in prospect – but would they be a new dawn, as all hoped, or, tragically, a final sunset?

When Janet Baker unveiled the cantata Phaedra, Op 93, at The Maltings, Snape on June 16, 1976, critics were astonished at this music of vividly searing dramatic power, as if hearing a concentrated opera in microcosm - but they also reported that the composer who acknowledged the great ovation seemed shockingly frail as he stood briefly to wave from the Box. At the height of his creative powers again, he was also clearly in physical decline. When the Amadeus Quartet then gave 'their' new quartet in the same building just before Christmas, the music assumed even greater significance, but could intuitively be felt now as a conscious swansong and a gesture of posthumous farewell.



In the event, this Third Quartet – as it had officially become – was something of a surprise for all concerned. The great Amadeus had recorded the Second Quartet of 1945 for Decca in 1963 (though oddly not No 1) and had long expressed the desire for a successor but, like so many other friends and performers in the same position, had also more or less given up hope of getting anything.

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For its dedicatee, the critic, writer and broadcaster Hans Keller, Quartet No 3 was a very particular reward. He had been nagging Britten on and off for the best part of three decades for a new quartet – here it was at last, and how!

#### A QUARTET'S ARCHITECTURE

Yet much about the Third Quartet is understated, as if whispered confidentially.

The opening is a gently grave oscillation of nudging tones and semitones, just touching but then as easily avoiding any clear key centre. Wisps of melody emerge only to disappear again, and the mood conveyed is uneasy, troubled. The music has to move but mustn't rush, as the muted colours shift in and out of a shadowy background. For six minutes, an intricately interwoven sequence

of 'Duets' – as this first movement is formally described – sustains a subtle sonata-form structure, so subtle in fact that it wasn't initially recognised as one, even by composer Colin Matthews, who, as Britten's amanuensis, wrote the first programme note and helped him prepare the manuscript score. This wasn't surprising, however, since Britten had been characteristically self-

deprecating about the piece, to the extent of thinking that it might actually just be called Divertimento – so Matthews very naturally related the work to the three cello suites written between 1964 and 1971 for Mstislav Rostropovich. The arch-like design of five contrasted movements – 'Duets', 'Ostinato', 'Solo', 'Burlesque', 'Recitative and Passcaglia' – would seem to confirm this kinship. But a subtitle to the finale, 'La Serenissima', points to some other source too and is a clue to a masterpiece full of secrets, as Hans Keller would have recognised immediately.

#### THE BIRTH OF A TRADITION

How did the Amadeus Quartet fare then with this mysterious score? Following the premiere and its broadcast, they planned to take the work into their repertoire quickly, with a second performance promised by Britten to fellow composer Alun Hoddinott at Cardiff University on January 19, 1977. This sadly didn't happen due to the indisposition, at the last minute, of viola player Peter Schidlof, but he soon recovered and another performance was given at the Schwetzingen Festival on May 21. Every concert there is recorded for broadcast as a matter of course but in 2010 Hänssler Classic released a series of performances from the festival archives and one was of this Amadeus performance set alongside Schubert's Death and the Maiden. What is immediately clear is that the players unquestionably have the music under their fingers. As a veteran ensemble, some minor frailties are easily pardoned but no apology is needed for the sheer intensity of their communication. The recorded sound is a bit claustrophobic and an editing glitch finds the last three bars of the second movement unaccountably reprised! Not therefore a version for

the Collection – but a vital historical document nonetheless.

The Amadeus waited until March of 1978 before making the first commercial recording, when Decca took them back to the perfect acoustic of The Maltings. This still sounds exemplary and has depth, detail and atmospheric presence. Even without the composer's presence to supervise proceedings, this performance has the stamp of authenticity. The unique and pervasive sound world of the opening 'duet' between viola and second violin is captured immediately as a 'middle-ground' texture, with the ebb and flow of this rocking music then quietly intensified by echoing long notes at the extremities on cello and first violin. Imagine the dappled reflections of sunlight from water on to the fraying walls of a Venetian palazzo and you get the picture. A gondola then moors itself for a moment and the music hovers tentatively in a blurred A major for some 10 bars – a longish stretch of stability in this music - as fragments of melody are sung by the first violin (Norbert Brainin) to trills below, between which a pizzicato figure on second violin (Siegmund Nissel) creeps tentatively up and down, shadowed by viola (Schidlof) or cello (Martin Lovett), before the rocking starts again. The development conjures a sudden stormy squall, which evaporates just as suddenly into a calming recapitulation (the opening reflected upside down) and resolving (just!) coda: the resolution being the bracing four-chord progression of the 'Ostinato' which follows. Every detail here is put perfectly in its place and the instrumental interplay is intimate and beautifully controlled.

It may as well be said right now that not one of the recordings listed in the Selected Discography is less than 'very good' and each one has its own special virtues in conveying the essence of Britten's elusive score. This is, in itself, eloquent testimony to the supreme mastery and practicality of his written instructions - this is at no level 'easy' or straightforward music to play and it would certainly have pushed the Amadeus some way beyond their comfort zone, both expressively and technically. Lest anyone imagine, however, that their impeccable 'studio' recording might represent a triumph of the Decca editor's art, along in 2005 came a DVD recording on Testament of a live performance they gave earlier at Snape on September 29, 1977 – exactly a year after their visit to Britten's home at The Red House in Aldeburgh to work with him on the score and then to play the piece through privately. As directed so sensitively by John Culshaw, this film is the nearest thing we have to being there at the premiere a few months later. It also shows very movingly how the difficulties are individually mastered within an interpretation of complete corporate integrity. If the leader Norbert Brainin conjures up the impression of the late Harry Worth imitating a violinist, and proves too distracting, then the Decca CD is just as satisfying in its own way.

#### **AFTER THE AMADEUS**

Following in the Amadeus's footsteps would not have been easy to contemplate and the first ensemble to stake out the territory on disc was the Alberni Quartet for CRD in 1981. Sounding better then than now, the performance is distinguished but not distinctive and the recorded sound in St Lawrence, Little Stanmore, a trifle opaque. In 1986 the Endellion Quartet and EMI (as were) went to St Michael's, Highgate,





#### **AUTHENTIC CHOICE**

#### **Amadeus Quartet**

Testament (F) SBDVD1002

Either on CD or this DVD, the Amadeus players are definitive. They worked with the ailing composer in his last year and realised that he was entrusting something very special to them. No chamber music collection should be without one of these.





#### DIFFERENT CHOICE

#### **Lindsay Quartet**

ASV © CDDCA608

With Peter Cropper a passionate guiding spirit, The Lindsays take this carefully wrought music and make it more thoroughly their own than any other quartet on disc. The result is to transform it still further into a desperately moving last testament.





#### PERFECT CHOICE

#### **Belcea Quartet**

EMI (F) (2) 557968-1; (S) (2) 228518-2

For an impeccable achievement in technical terms - both as performance and recording - this version is unbeatable. The players have a rare unanimity of approach yet the sound manages to convey each as an individual within the sound picture.



The Amadeus Quartet rehearsing for the premiere at The Maltings, Snape, with (from left) Peter Pears, Colin Matthews, Imogen Holst and Donald Mitchell

for a recording of the quartet which sat at the summit of a 'complete' survey of Britten's chamber music for strings (with some recorded at Rosslyn Hill round the corner in Hampstead) which remains unique in featuring a whole sheaf of early and hitherto unpublished material. The performance of Op 94 is supremely authoritative and enjoys a sense of freedom and invention which would have made the final cut, if it weren't for some vagaries in the recorded balance which now sound compromising. But this is still preferable to the Endellion's 2013 remake on Warner Classics which is less spontaneous in approach and more closely recorded.

In January 1988 the long-lamented Lindsay Quartet recorded Britten's Third in Sheffield for ASV, alongside Tippett's Fourth Quartet, which he wrote for them in 1977-78. Taking the music as if from scratch, this performance by The Lindsays might well have infuriated Britten himself, known as he was to be a connoisseur of those who fastidiously followed his instructions. Tippett, in complete contrast, was happy to let performers explore and challenge his writing, so long as they ultimately got to the heart of the matter. Thus emboldened, The Lindsays may possibly have taken this approach to Britten's more tailor-made creation a little too far – but one should listen to their interpretation with open ears and forget that all sorts of detailed minutiae are overlooked in favouring the bigger emotional picture. Rather as Jon Vickers differed from Peter Pears in portraying Peter Grimes in the round, so The

Lindsays wear their hearts on their sleeves and in so doing get under the music's skin in a completely different yet equally convincing way. The result is to jettison any sense that Britten may sometimes be too reserved, buttoned-up. This is, after all, music written under the shadow of death and at times the awareness of fate stalking the pages breaks out with heartbreaking immediacy. No other recording dares push the emotional boundaries so far, but for that very reason it is indispensable in providing a wider perspective. Reviewing the original LP in another place back in 1988 I find that I wrote of The Lindsays as 'flexible and loving in the slow music and pungent and astringent in the fast' -'loving' being the most instructive and unexpected word in looking back now over a distance of more than 25 years.

#### **VENETIAN GAMES**

'La Serenissima' written over the finale is Britten's shorthand for telling us that this quartet is actually about Venice. Everything in his life now seems, in retrospect, to lead up to his final opera – the remarkable adaptation of Thomas Mann's novella Death in Venice completed in spring 1973 and then away from it, for three painful last years. In fact, the very act of completing the opera was in itself a desperate gamble with his health, of which Britten was obviously aware. He was told in 1972 that he urgently needed an operation to replace a defective heart valve but struck a deal with his doctor that he would hold out until the full score was finished - and then submit himself to the surgeon's knife. Even Pears reportedly complained that 'Ben is writing this evil opera and it's killing him'.

### SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE	ARTISTS	RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)
1977	Amadeus Qt	Hänssler Classic (E) CD93 706 (A/10)
1977	Amadeus Qt	Testament 🖲 🙅 SBDVD1002 (2/06)
1978	Amadeus Qt	Decca (M) → 475 O512 (11/78 <sup>R</sup> )
1981	Alberni Qt	CRD <b>(M</b> ) CRD3395 (3/89)
1986	Endellion Qt	EMI (\$) (6) 015149-2 (5/88°, 7/95°)
1988	Lindsay Qt	ASV (Ē) CDDCA608 (5/88)
1990	Britten Qt	Brilliant Classics (9) (2) 9168 (5/91 <sup>R</sup> )
1995	Sorrel Qt	Chandos (P) CHAN9469 (9/96)
1997	Maggini Qt	Naxos (B) 8 554360 (9/99)
2001	Brodsky Qt	Challenge Classics (F) CC72099 (6/03)
2003	Belcea Qt	EMI (F) (2) 557968-2 (7/05); (S) (2) 228518-2
2005	Emperor Qt	BIS (F) BIS1570 (12/13)
2008	Elias Qt	Sonimage (F) SON10903 (6/10)
2013	Endellion Qt	Warner (M) (2) 2564 64200-8 (12/13)
2013	Takács Qt	Hyperion (F) CDA68004 (11/13)

MARTIN RANDALL TRAVEL

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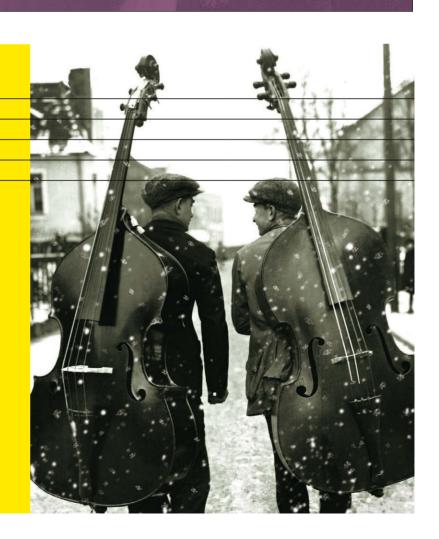
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Britten and Pears by the river Alde at Snape, May 1975

Britten, however, was partly writing the part of Gustav von Aschenbach specifically as a last major operatic role for his partner; and, as Michael Tippett said in his obituary on the day of Britten's death, 'all the love which he had for his singer flowed out into this work'. Pears, and others, would also have been aware that here was a case, nevertheless, of life mirroring art - and vice versa – in ways which were, to say the least, uncomfortable. When working frantically in Venice on the premiere production of The Turn of the Screw in 1954, Britten had been dangerously obsessed with the young boy actor/singer David Hemmings who was creating the role of Miles, with Pears observing both fact and fiction as the 'singing ghost' Peter Quint. Here in Death in Venice a distinguished middle-aged writer finds himself compulsively drawn to an alluring young Polish boy called Tadzio and dies while he watches him walking out to sea with a beckoning gesture. And now, in November 1975, Britten returns to Venice to complete his new quartet.

Aschenbach's role in the opera embodies the key of E – and when the closing 'Passacaglia' of Quartet No 3 begins, it emerges from a sequence of tortured recitatives (in which each instrument in turn recalls melodic lines from the opera) but sidesteps magically from C – the apparent long-term centre and ultimate goal of the entire work – into E major. This transcendent moment is a purely musical transfiguration, yes, but to those familiar with the opera it also invokes the very motif to which Aschenbach (partly

to his own surprise) first sings the words 'I love you' at the end of Act 1. And it is this emotion, in some form, which needs to imbue the slow tune which the violin then sings above the even slower stalking tread of the ground bass itself in the cello. This is where performances diverge most critically, essentially over the delicate balance between tempo and emotion. Britten's instruction, 'slowly moving', is nicely ambiguous but beautifully captured by the Amadeus, with his approval: it must move at a gentle walking pace with the emotion judiciously contained. This is matched by the Brodsky, Belcea, Maggini, Emperor, Elias and Takács Quartets. The Lindsays dare to go much slower and yet create a deeply moving apotheosis. Taking this approach too are the Britten and Sorrel Quartets (both recorded at Snape) in 1990 and 1995 respectively, but it proves a fatal misjudgement: the one impossibly funereal and the other verging on the glacial. In both cases the slow tempo freezes the emotion implicit in the music.

The other decisive moment comes at the very heart of the slow central 'Solo'. The first violin is the soloist and for the most part spins a high-lying meditation above a hushed sequence of rising arpeggios from the other instruments in turn. This is marked 'very calm' but is also precariously quiet, as if time and breathing are virtually suspended in mid-air. Then, in a flash, time speeds up and three spans of faster music precede a return to the music of the opening, now transfigured. The violin goes briefly into freefall with a recollection of birdsong ringing in Britten's mind from

his Suffolk inland retreat at Chapel House, Horham, where he spent much of his convalescence. Norbert Brainin conveys this moment brilliantly, with freedom and precision in perfect equilibrium. This challenge defeats the leaders of the Emperor, Elias and Takács Quartets, who are all too aggressive and ugly here. So we are left with Andrew Haveron leading the Brodskys for Challenge Classics at Snape in 2001 and Corina Belcea with her eponymous group on EMI at Potton Hall (also in Suffolk) in 2003. The Belceas are impeccable throughout and this is the most perfect of all the performances, the closest in spirit and execution to the Amadeus; and so, ruled by head, I would opt for this. But my heart ultimately belongs with the Brodskys, who humanise every corner of the music with a rare radiance and reach the final pages with heart-stopping tenderness, resignation and catharsis. The last dying low pedal D on cello seems at first a surprise - but it is, of course, the last note of the ground itself and was thus implicit all along. When he was coaching the Elias Quartet in this movement, their leader Sara Bitlloch recalled Norbert Brainin saying, after a long silence: 'Ben wrote his own death.' Hearing this extraordinary music away from his violin, he suddenly realised what he'd somehow known all along but never put into words. Michael Tippett, however, had done so. In the wake of hearing Death in Venice, 'there was a sense, with those of us outside the immediate circle, of apprehension: an apprehension which was deepened as we knew of his illness. The apprehension is totally fulfilled, and we are left with a sense of sorrow and loss.' And the music says it too. @





#### **TOP CHOICE**

#### **Brodsky Quartet**

Challenge Classics © CC72099

This performance combines the best of all worlds - technically immaculate but also warmly communicative; and, with Colin Matthews supervising behind the scenes at Snape Maltings, you also feel Britten's benign spirit hovering in the wings.



Visit the Gramophone Player at gramophone.co.uk to hear excerpts from this month's featured recordings

# **PLAYLISTS**

Explore music via our themed listening suggestions – and why not create your own too?

or this, the second instalment of our Playlists feature, pianist Alice Sara Ott introduces 10 tracks by composers who wrote for Diaghilev's Ballets Russes that tie in with her latest album for two pianos, 'Scandale' (reviewed in the July issue). Gramophone's Deputy Editor Sarah Kirkup, meanwhile, chooses 10 pieces for solo or accompanied flute by 20th-century French composers – a homage to the French Flute School and her own music college days. And finally Gramophone critic Jed Distler selects 10 epic piano sonatas by composers from Beethoven and Brahms to Alkan and Ives. And don't forget, you can sample these playlists yourself by visiting gramophone.co.uk/playlists



# Alice Sara Ott chooses 10 pieces connected with the Ballets Russes that caused a musical debacle

In September of last year, when Francesco Tristano and I began recording the disc that has just been released, we still hadn't found a fitting title for our project. When deciding on repertoire, there was one work that was a definite for both of us: the piano version (for four hands) of Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

It wasn't only the polytonal and polyrhythmic structure that had created a milestone in the music of the 20th century that we found fascinating, but the time and conditions in which the piece was written and premiered.

During our research, we stumbled across Sergei Diaghilev, the impresario of the Ballets Russes, who commissioned the piece and organised its premiere.

The premiere on May 29, 1913, in Paris was a public scandal. Audience members stood on their chairs, booed and laughed at the music and choreography. Stravinsky and Vaslav Nijinsky, who was in charge of the choreography, were deeply offended, but Diaghilev wasn't. For him, the scandal was a big success. It ripped the audiences out of their civilised ways, it shocked and provoked. Diaghilev's visions were oriented towards the future – he wanted to create something new and break down old boundaries.

Diaghilev, a big lover of art, had dabbled in music, painting and ballet, but had to



Igor Stravinsky, on the podium, many years after the eventful 1913 premiere of his ballet, The Rite of Spring

acknowledge very early on that his talents didn't lie in creating art, but collecting and bringing art and artists together. So he surrounded himself with composers, dancers and painters, to give them the opportunity to give themselves fully to their creativity, without being reliant on financial or commercial success. 'L'art pour l'art' was the premise of the group.

When Francesco and I were searching for works for two pianos by other composers who had composed for Ballets Russes and came across Debussy, Ravel, Prokofiev and Rimsky-Korsakov, we were not in the least bit surprised that they had all, in their day, caused a musical debacle.

And so, at the end of the recording and after having been immersed in the music and history, the title was pretty obvious: 'Scandale'.

A homage to a visionary and to a time when a group of people changed the art world and threw it on its head.

- Stravinsky The Rite of Spring Columbia SO / Igor Stravinsky Sony Classical
- Satie Gymnopédie No 3 Alfred Cortot pf Naïve
- Debussy Trois nocturnes Fêtes
   Cleveland Orchestra / Pierre Boulez DG
- Falla Homenaje pour le tombeau de Claude Debussy Miloš Karadaglić gtr DG
- Stravinsky Tango Katia and Marielle Labèque pfs KML

- Ravel Shéhérazade Asie
  Heather Harper sop BBC SO /
  Pierre Boulez Sony
- Poulenc Les biches Rag-Mazurka
   City of London Sinfonia / Richard Hickox
   Frato
- Satie Parade Orchestra de la Société des Concerts du Conservatoire / Louis Auriacombe EMI
- Stravinsky Petrushka Russian Dance Yuja Wang pf DG
- Rimsky-Korsakov Sheherazade
   BPO / Herbert von Karajan DG

## Sprawling piano sonatas

#### Jed Distler lists his choice of 10 'epic' solo piano works that demand a great deal from player and listener

Some piano sonatas are epic both in size and scope, and push performers and audiences to their limits. Here are 10, beginning with Beethoven's all-butimpossible *Hammerklavier*, with its optimistic tempo markings and crazy, combative fugal finale. The young Brahms came along and sort of imitated it via his thick, overextended and often exciting Op 1. Post-war serial composers needed their atonal *Hammerklavier* equivalent, and found it in Jean Barraqué's Sonata, with its barrages of notes and sudden long silences. However, Paul Dukas arguably penned the most meaty and lush among long, complex

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and difficult French piano sonatas. Three maverick Americans follow: Charles Ives's First Sonata is lesser known yet more cohesive and fluid than his more celebrated Second (the *Concord*), but fewer brave pianists have faced the craggy stylistic cross-cutting throughout Frederic Rzewski's big three-movement Sonata, let alone Andrew Violette's severe yet exultant two-and-a-half hour Seventh Sonata. Alkan, of course, was the ultimate maverick: who else would write a long sonata where each of its four movements becomes progressively slower? Not Medtner, whose gnarly Night Wind abounds in elaborate contrapuntal tapestry and restless harmonic motion. All the more reason to take a deep breath and cool down with the unpressured poetry and 'heavenly length' of Schubert's final sonata.

- Beethoven Piano Sonata No 29, 'Hammerklavier'
   Igor Levit pf Sony Classical
- Brahms Piano Sonata No 1
   Julius Katchen pf Decca
- Barraqué Sonata Stefan Litwin pf CPO
- Dukas Piano Sonata
   Vladimir Stoupel pf SWR Digital
- Ives Piano Sonata No 1
   Peter Lawson pf Virgin



Igor Levit plays Beethoven's epic Hammerklavier

- Rzewski Sonata for Piano
   Frederic Rzewski pf Nonesuch
- Violette Piano Sonata No 7
   Andrew Violette pf Innova
- Alkan Grande Sonate, Les quatre ages Albert Frantz pf Gramola
- Medtner 'Night Wind' Sonata in E Minor Sevrein von Eckardstein pf K&K Grand Piano Masters
- Schubert Piano Sonata in B flat, D960
   Leon Fleisher pf Vanguard

## French flute music

# Sarah Kirkup explores the diverse sonatas and solo music written for the flute during the 20th century

The French Flute School, of which Claude-Paul Taffanel (1844-1908) is regarded as the founder, gave rise to a huge number of compositions for - and performances of - the flute during the mid-20th century. This French-influenced way of playing - broadly characterised by the use of the French-style silver flute, emphasis on beauty of tone and the use of specific teaching materials such as the tone exercises of Marcel Moyse - spread to Europe and the US. By the 1970s, however, the French School had, according to Moyse himself, 'disappeared' - yet elements remained in music schools and conservatoires. British flautist Trevor Wye, for example, was taught by Moyse and has published several practice books which adhere to Moyse's principals.

I remember owning one of Trevor Wye's practice books when I was at school, and ploughing through Moyse's *De la sonorité* at music college. But more interesting to me were the volumes of French flute music thrown at me by my teachers, from Debussy and Saint-Saëns to Varèse and Messaien. This was music that really spoke to me. Yes, I liked Bach, but back then, as a teenager and young twenty-something, playing French music on the flute just felt so right. The flourishes, the gorgeous melodies, the 'prettiness' of it all, just appealed to me enormously.

So creating this playlist has been a trip down memory lane. The Fauré Fantaisie is one of the first 'proper' pieces I remember learning. For Grade 8, I played the famous Poulenc Sonata and it's been a favourite ever since. I learned both Varèse's Density 21.5 (so-named after the weight of platinum) and the Chaminade at music college, where I also encountered the Saint-Saëns Romance, Jolivet's fiercely difficult Chant de Linos and Messaien's Le merle noir (which I played at my final recital). I never fail to be mesmerised by



James Galway brings his unique tone to Syrinx

Debussy's *Syrinx* and Honegger's *Danse de la chèvre* – you can practically see that goat hopping across the mountain top! – while the Dutilleux is dark, edgy, soulful and technically brilliant: the whole package. I've chosen flautists who have either influenced me personally and/or who have had a significant impact on the flute world. I hope these 10 pieces show you just what the flute can do – on its own or with just the piano for accompaniment.

- Messiaen Le merle noir Patrick Gallois fl Naxos
- Dutilleux Sonatine Sharon Bezaly fl Ronald Brautigam pf BIS
- Jolivet Chant de Linos Robert Aitken fl Robin McCabe pf BIS
- Varèse Density 21.5 Peter-Lukas Graf fl Claves
- Honegger Danse de la chèvre Marc Grawels fl Pavane
- Chaminade Concertino
   Kenneth Smith fl Paul Rhodes pf ASV
- Fauré Fantaisie Emmanuel Pahud fl Eric Le Sage pf Skarbo
- Poulenc Flute Sonata Adam Walker fl James Baillieu pf Opus Arte
- Debussy Syrinx James Galway fl RCA Red Seal
- Saint-Saëns Romance William Bennett fl Clifford Benson pf Cala

## qobuz

Why not contribute a playlist? To do so, visit qobuz.com and explore

the available recordings. Once you've created your playlist of 10 recordings, simply send a link with an introductory paragraph and 'playlist' in the subject line to gramophone@ markallengroup.com. If we choose your playlist for publication, you'll receive a year's free subscription to Qobuz! See gramophone.co.uk/playlists for more details, and terms and conditions

## Dear musicians, dear colleagues, dear friends,

# The Year of Czech Music 2014 is coming to an end...





#### HIGHLIGHTS IN NOVEMBER AND DECEMBER 2014 IN CZECH REPUBLIC

2 Nov A. Dvořák – Requiem, Pilsen Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic Choir, T. Brauner – conductor, St. Bartholomew Cathedral, Pilsen

**8 Nov Motion Scores 2014** (premiere), **/12 Dec** foreign choreographers – Czech music,
 Theatre Ponec, Prague

11 Nov B. Smetana - The Devil's Wall

/6 Dec (premiere in 2014), J. Nekvasil - director,

/**11 Dec** R. Jindra – *conductor*, National Moravian-Silesian Theatre Ostrava

**12 Nov 1914** (premiere in 2014), /6 Dec R. Wilson – *director*, A. Březina – *music*,

21-29 Nov Janáček Brno Festival, Brno

/7 Dec Estate Theatre Prague

21 Nov L. Janáček – The Makropulos Affair /6 Dec (premiere), D. Radok – director, M. Ivanovič – conductor, Janáček Opera House Brno

**22 Nov** L. Janáček – The Cunning Little Vixen /7 Dec (chamber version, premiere),
Theatre on Orlí Brno

4 Dec In the Power of Magic – Erben and Dvořák, HK Philharmonic Orchestra,
A. S. Weiser – conductor, Soňa Červená – recitation, Hradec Králové

4 Dec Zdeněk Fibich Shines in the Shade of Smetana and Dvořák, Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra, J. Petrdlík – conductor, T. Kostková, F. Sychra – soloists, Olomouc

7 Dec M. Nejtek - State... Staged Concert /8 Dec (world premiere), Berg 2014 - City, J. Adámek - director, Berg Orchestra, P. Vrábel - conductor, Archa Theatre, Praque

8 Dec Talich Quartet - Concert to the 50th Anniversary of the Ensemble, Rudolfinum, Prague

9 Dec L. Janáček - Excursions of Mr. Brouček (premiere in 2014), SKUTR - director, R. Jindra - conductor, National Moravian-Silesian Theatre, Ostrava

10 Dec Concert in Honour of B. Martinů,
/11 Dec B. Martinů, J. Klusák (world premiere),
A. Dvořák, Prague Symphony Orchestra,
T. Brauner – conductor,
Municipal House, Prague

11 Dec B. Martinů - The Epic of Gilgamesh (world premiere of critical edition version), Brno Philharmonic, Czech Philharmonic Choir Brno, A. Markovič - conductor, Janáček Opera House, Brno

**12 Dec** A. Hába – The New Country (world premiere), M. Bambušek – director, P. Kofroň – condutor, National Theatre Prague

17 Dec B. Martinů – What Men Live By
/18 Dec concert performance of the opera
(Czech premiere), Czech Philharmonic,
J. Bělohlávek – conductor,
Rudolfinum, Praque

17 Dec GALA CONCERT FOR THE YEAR OF CZECH MUSIC, official closing concert of the Year of Czech Music 2014, B. Smetana, A. Dvořák, members of profesional Czech orchestras and choirs, J. Hrůša – conductor, A. M. Martinez, E. Urbanová, R. Vargas, A. Plachetka – soloists, O2 arena, Prague

More information at www.yearofczechmusic.cz



# PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

This month, Carnegie Hall launches a new partnership with medici.tv, Alan Gilbert brings Nielsen's Third Symphony to Berlin and Katarina Karnéus sings Mahler in London

#### London's Barbican & BBC Radio 3

Josep Pons conducts the BBC SO and Singers in Brett Dean's The Annunciation, November 19 Respighi's *Trittico botticelliano* – his homage to Botticelli's paintings – and Strauss's orchestral showcase *Le bourgeois gentilhomme* frame the central piece of this programme, Brett Dean's *The Annunciation*. This festive, four-part Christmas cantata, commissioned for the 800th birthday of Bach's own St Thomas's Choir in Leipzig, depicts the journey of the three kings from darkness to light and is scored for chamber orchestra and choir. The entire concert is broadcast live on Radio 3.

barbican.org.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

#### New York's Carnegie Hall & WQXR

#### Gil Shaham plays Prokofiev's Violin Concerto No 2, November 20

A tantalising programme from visiting orchestra the San Francisco Symphony, which opens with the New York premiere of Samuel Carl Adams's *Drift and Providence* and concludes with the ravishing *Daphnis et Chloé* by Ravel. The central work is Prokofiev's Second Violin Concerto, written for one of Ravel's collaborators, the violinist Robert Soetens, and performed here by Gil Shaham. The concert is part of Carnegie Hall Live, a programme produced by WQXR and Carnegie Hall that's now in its fourth season. You can listen to the performance live on WQXR or via the radio station's website.

carnegiehall.org; wqxr.org

#### Berlin Philharmonie & Digital Concert Hall

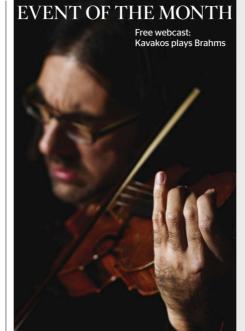
## Alan Gilbert, plus Riccardo Chailly and Martha Argerich, November 22 & 29

On November 22, the New York Philharmonic's Music Director Alan Gilbert brings one of his enthusiasms, Nielsen's Third Symphony, Sinfonia espansiva, to the BPO in a programme that also includes Bach's Cantata No 58, and the Third Symphony (Scottish) by Bach's champion Felix Mendelssohn. The following week, the conductor of Gramophone's Recording of the Year, Riccardo Chailly, is joined by Martha Argerich in Schumann's Piano Concerto; the concert opens with Mendelssohn's Ruy Blas Overture and ends with the Third Symphony of Rachmaninov.

berliner-philharmoniker.de

#### New York's Metropolitan Opera & cinemas

Christopher Maltman stars in Rossini's Il barbiere di Siviglia, November 22 British baritone Christopher Maltman sings the



#### Carnegie Hall & medici.tv

## Mutter, Kavakos, Wang and Trifonov, throughout November

A new partnership between Carnegie Hall and medici.tv is offering free webcasts for those unable to get to New York. On November 18 violinist Anne-Sophie Mutter performs Vivaldi's The Four Seasons and the US premiere of Previn's Violin Concerto No 2. Then, on November 22, our new *Gramophone* Artist of the Year Leonidas Kavakos is joined by pianist Yuja Wang in music by Schumann, Respighi, Stravinsky and Brahms (the duo's recording of the latter for Decca earned them an Editor's Choice in July). The final webcast is on December 9 when Russian pianist Daniil Trifonov performs Bach (arr Liszt), Beethoven and Liszt. Following each live webcast, the concerts are available online for 90 days, so you can still catch Joyce DiDonato's Venetian recital from early November.

carnegiehall.org; medici.tv

role of Figaro in Bartlett Sher's production of Rossini's *II barbiere di Siviglia*, conducted by Michele Mariotti. The 34-year-old Mariotti made his Lyric Opera of Chicago debut earlier this year with the same opera. The Met's popular 'Live in HD' performances are broadcast to hundreds of cinemas around the world, bringing great opera to many thousands who don't happen to live near Manhattan, or don't want to shell out up to \$460 for a ticket. Isabel Leonard sings Rosina and Lawrence Brownlee is the Count.

metopera.org

#### Vienna Staatsoper & web

## Sascha Goetzel conducts Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro, November 25

The Staatsoper's new streaming initiative allows you to purchase a 'ticket' to selected streamed performances and watch them at home. Luca Pisaroni, who sings the Count, has actually recorded the role of Figaro for a Teatro Real DVD conducted by Jesús López Cobos (7/12). As *Gramophone*'s David Patrick Stearns wrote, 'His performance here shows why his Figaro is getting around: he vividly projects the character's inner life.' The Figaro in the Staatsoper's production is Adam Plachetka, who appeared in the *Così fan tutte* conducted by Yannick Nezet-Seguin for DG which was shortlisted for a *Gramophone* Award this year.

wiener-staatsoper.at

#### **Detroit SO & DSO Live**

## Leonard Slatkin oversees an all-American programme, November 28, 29 & 30

The young Finnish violinist Elina Vähälä joins the Detroit SO and its Music Director Leonard Slatkin in an all-American programme. John Corigliano's *The Red Violin* Concerto is preceded by Bernstein's Three Dance Episodes from *On the Town*. Also on the menu is Copland's ballet *Grohg* and Robert Russell Bennett's concert version of Gershwin's *Porgy and Bess*. Catch it live, or watch it online on November 30.

dso.org

#### London's Barbican & Radio 3

Katerina Karnéus performs Mahler's Lieder Eines fahrenden Gesellen, November 28 Mark Minkowski's recent live recordings of Schubert's symphonies have been acclaimed for their energy and clarity; here he conducts the BBC Symphony Orchestra in the Fourth, the *Tragic*, before being joined by Katarina Karnéus, the distinguished mezzo-soprano, for Mahler's poignant early song-cycle, *Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen*. The First Symphony by Hans Rott, the Austrian contemporary of Mahler, concludes the programme. The concert is broadcast live on BBC Radio 3 and will be available on the BBC iPlayer thereafter.

barbican.org.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3



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Joyce DiDonato Stella di Napoli



**Dmitri Hvorostovsky** The Bells of Dawn



Lawrence Zazzo A Royal Trio



The Bach Choir Howells: Stabat Mater, Te Deum & Sine Nomine

HOWELLS

Stabat Mater
Te Deum • Sine nomine
in Hulett, Tenor • Alison Hill, Soprano
The Bach Choir
uth Symphony Orchestra • David Hill

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# HIGH FIDELITY

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THIS MONTH I explore a miniature amplifier from Pro-ject and explain how a jazz musician is leading the revival of a famous hi-fi brand.

Andrew Everard Audio Editor

#### NOVEMBER TEST DISCS



The Reference Recordings label is celebrated for its superb sound and this programme of French works for organ is no exception.



Crisp, taut playing by the Emperor Quartet combines with a superb recorded sound, both in stereo and SACD 5.1-channel surround.

# Comebacks, revisions and impressive innovations

An old name reborn, a famous range revitalised and more high-resolution options in the news this month



/ ithout a doubt, the headline news in audio is the return of one of the big Japanese brands. Technics has returned after more than half a decade of hiatus, and it turns out the former engineers had been beavering away in their spare time all along. More on the revival in this month's Audio Essay; but at the heart of the new products is the flagship Technics R1 'Reference Series' 1, set to sell for around £32,000 when it hits the shops later this year.

Comprising a network music player/ preamplifier, power amplifier and truly massive floorstanding speakers, the R1 system packs plenty of innovative technology, including an all-digital link from preamp to power amp, and a calibration system designed to optimise the amplifier for the speakers with which it's used. The same features are found in the less expensive C700 'premium' range, comprising a CD player, network player, integrated amplifier and standmount speakers, and selling for a little over £3000 for a system, with the CD player an £800 option. Look out for a review in the coming months.

Also on order is a pair of speakers from the new Bowers & Wilkins CM S2 range 2, which replaces and expands on the previous CM line-up, derived from

the company's original 'compact monitor' design. Nine models make up the series, starting with the CM1 S2 at £649 per pair and going up to the £2999/pr CM10 S2, and including two new centre-channel speakers and a subwoofer. Among the new features of the range are the Decoupled Double Dome tweeters and FST midrange drivers seen in the 600 S2 models, highquality Mundorf capacitors in the new crossovers, and anti-resonance dustcaps in all bass and midrange units, while the CM6 S2 and CM10 S2 models have their tweeters mounted on top of the main enclosure in a decoupled 'pod' derived from the company's 800 Series Diamond speakers. Now on sale, the speakers are available in four finishes.

Speaking of speakers, Sony has added to its high-resolution audio range with two new pairs, the floorstanding SS-AC3 and the standmount SS-AC5 ③. Both models feature baffles shaped to damp down vibrations and resonances, and 13cm mid/bass units: one in the SS-AC5, expected to sell for around £600 per pair, and one midrange and two aluminiumcone bass units in the £1995/pr SS-AC3. Both designs also use Sony's I-ARRAY triple high-frequency driver system, which combines a 25mm soft-dome tweeter with two 19mm 'assist tweeters', designed

to improve dispersion and extend the listening sweet-spot.

Sony also caters for those wanting high-resolution music on the move with its Walkman NWZ-A15 ②, said to be the smallest and lightest hi-res audio player available. It uses Sony's S-Master HX digital amplification, has 16GB of internal memory expandable with memory cards, and allows 30 hours' playback with high-resolution files or 50 hours with MP3.

Also new from Sony is a highly portable headphone amplifier, the PHA-3AC, able to accept digital content at up to 32-bit/384kHz, and a pair of headphones with built-in digital-to-analogue conversion of content at up to 24-bit/192kHz, the MDR-1ADAC **5**. Both models will also accept DSD 2.8MHz and 5.6MHz audio.

Finally, Onkyo has launched an innovative CD player with built-in network music player capability. The £350 Onkyo C-N7050 uses a 32-bit processor and a 32-bit digital-to-analogue conversion system able to handle both 24-bit/192kHz FLAC files and DSD5.6 over a network connection, as well as having internet radio built in and an iOS-compliant front-panel USB port for the connection of iPhones, iPods and iPads. The player can also be controlled using an Onkyo app running on iOS and Android devices.

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#### **REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH**

## Pro-Ject MaiA

Ultra-compact amplifier with remarkable flexibility

ast month I looked at the striking NAD D 3020 digital amplifier, with its unusual vertical design and volume control vaguely reminiscent of a Dalek. This month it's another compact integrated amp, this time with a more conventional format – only smaller.

Any time I visit a Pro-Ject stand at a hi-fi show I think I know I'm going to see turntables and an array of the tiny Box Design hi-fi components, now encompassing everything from phono stages to CD players and digital-toanalogue converters. However, Pro-Ject also has a knack of surprising visitors, and in this case the surprise was the MaiA amplifier, standing just under 4cm tall and a little over 20cm wide, and yet managing to cram in no fewer than nine inputs. Not only that, but among those inputs are aptXcapable Bluetooth, asynchronous USB for computer connection and a moving magnet phono stage for a turntable.

The name means My Audiophile Integrated Amplifier, but while that, the compact dimensions and the light weight - it only weighs 1.25kg without its offboard power supply - might appear to conspire to give the Pro-Ject the air of a toy, there's substance to this little amplifier, which sells for £399. As well as those inputs already mentioned, it has three stereo analogue line-ins (two on RCA phonos, one on a 3.5mm socket), two optical and one coaxial/ electric digital input, and outputs on speaker terminals and a 'full-size' 6.3mm headphone socket, plus a variable line level output on a 3.5mm socket. The USB and coaxial digital inputs can

support content at up to 24-bit/192kHz, while the optical inputs support 24-bit/96kHz, with digital-to-analogue conversion being handled by a Cirrus Logic multibit Delta Sigma DAC.

Meanwhile, the phono stage is derived from the design of Pro-Ject's best-selling Phono Box, meaning it's a major part of the design here and not just a makeweight, while the amplifier modules are sourced from Japanese company Flying Mole, founded back in 2000 by former Yamaha engineers. Here its amplifier modules deliver 25W per channel into an 8 ohm load, and 37W into 4 ohms, and are coupled with Pro-Ject's low-noise preamplifier circuitry, with further noise reduction being achieved by the use of that offboard power supply. Available with silver or black faceplates to match other models in the Pro-Ject Box Design S-Series, the MaiA comes with a remote handset.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

Setting up and using the Pro-Ject MaiA is hardly an onerous task. The mains transformer plugs into the rear of the amplifier, and a small Bluetooth antenna provided in the box screws on to a terminal also on the back panel. Speakers are connected using terminal slightly closely spaced – no doubt due to the relatively small amount of space available on the back of this little amp – but able to take either 4mm banana plugs or (with a little care) bare wire ends, which are clamped down with screw inserts.

No drivers are needed when using the MaiA asynchronous USB input with Apple



#### **PRO-JECT MAIA**

Type Integrated amplifier

Price £399

Power output 25Wpc into 8 ohms,

37Wpc into 4 ohms

Analogue inputs Three line on RCA

sockets, MM phono

**Digital inputs** Asynchronous USB on Type B socket, two optical, coaxial/ electrical on RCA socket

Other inputs aptX Bluetooth

Outputs One pair of speakers on combination terminals, 6.3mm headphone output, 3.5mm stereo analogue out (variable level) for subwoofer or second zone

**Digital-to-analogue conversion** 

24-bit/192kHz

Finishes Black case with black

or silver faceplate

**Accessories supplied** Remote handset **Dimensions** (WxHxD) 20.6x3.6x22cm

henleydesigns.co.uk

computers, but when using Windows PCs the driver provided on a CD in the box will need to be loaded. Finally, the little remote handset is powered by a single button-type battery: it offers on/standby, volume up/down and input selection (on buttons marked 'CH+/-'), these functions duplicated by the volume knob and tiny buttons on the front of the amplifier, which also carries input indicators.

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## SUGGESTED PARTNERS

The little Pro-Ject amplifier is a perfect choice for 'desktop audio', so try using it with these...

#### **PRO-JECT ELEMENTAL**

One of the star features of the MaiA is its built-in phono stage, so a turntable is an obvious partner. The Elemental is the most affordable model from Pro-Ject and would make a fine match with the little amplifier.

#### **B&W 686S2**

You can drive much larger speakers with the MaiA but its compact dimensions almost demand the use of something small and fine-sounding. The entry-level B&W 600 series model, the 686S2, fits the bill excellently.



Suprisingly given its size, the MaiA amplifier will form a highly competent hub for small-scale systems – you can hook it up to large floorstanding speakers. It will drive them reasonably provided you don't have a large room you want to fill with music at very high levels – though there is distinct thickening-up of the sound and a rather brittle treble when you push it hard.

However, use it as you might expect it to be intended, driving speakers of more modest size and reasonable sensitivity, and this little amplifier is very much in its element. I tried it with models including the budget-price Roth OLi RA1 and the Neat Iotas, and in each case it acquitted itself with a sound well on the money in the sub-£500 integrated amplifier arena.

True, it's a little light in the bass, though it covers its tracks well with its speed and definition, plus warmth in the upper bass, and in absolute terms the treble majors more on sweetness than on absolute revelation of every little detail. The balance, though, is both well judged for the kind of speakers with which it is likely to be used and consistent across the range of inputs on offer.

Used with my trusty Rega Planar 2 turntable, the smoothness of the phono stage, allied to fine definition with a wide range of well-kept LPs, is exactly as one might expect from this section's origins in a design that so far has sold in the hundreds of thousands. It trawls out the information from a turntable and cartridge without over-emphasising any of the deficiencies of vinyl and like other Pro-Ject products does a very good job of convincing the listener that LPs are still special.

At the other end of the technology spectrum, playing content from the computer using Bluetooth or the USB connection shows the quality of the digital-to-analogue conversion and amplification here, in that it's not hard to distinguish the slightly parched sound of audio delivered wirelessly from the richer, more involving wired version. That said, the Bluetooth implementation here is more enjoyable than that in many a budget wireless speaker or system and more than good enough for background music or for streaming content from a portable device to the amplifier on an ad hoc basis.

However, it's when connected to a computer using the asynchronous USB input and playing content using a highquality software player such as BitPerfect (if you really must use iTunes), Amarra or Audirvarna that the MaiA really earns its spurs as a desktop audio amplifier more than capable of challenging some leading rivals. What's more, the sound on offer here is more than revealing and involving enough to demonstrate the differences between compressed, uncompressed and 'better than CD' formats, as I discovered playing one of the excellent releases from the enterprising Resonus Classics label - the Elysium Ensemble's set of the Sei Duetti of John Joachim Quantz in 320kbps MP3, CD-quality WAV and 24-bit/192kHz FLAC. The CD version had a less-congested sound than the MP3 and more tonal richness, while the 24/96 version breathed more freely and revealed more of the flute and violin timbres.

Yes, the Pro-Ject lacks the highend digital flexibility of the Denon DA-300USB DAC, but then it costs not so much more and does come complete with built-in amplification. Comparing it to conventionally sized amplifiers with digital inputs, the MaiA's compact dimensions give it the edge if you're considering putting a complete hi-fi system on your desk or in a small room. Combine the MaiA with a pair of those Roth speakers I mentioned earlier and you have a complete 'just-add-computer' system for less than £500, or indeed a complete computer audio system for £1000 with the addition of a Mac Mini – and it can be done for even less if you seek out one of the many Minis available either refurbished or used, or choose a budget 'netbook' as your music source. Spend £200 on a netbook and another £60-£100 on an external hard drive for more music storage and you'll have a true bargain system - and the Pro-Ject sounds good with headphones, too.

Like the NAD D 3020 I reviewed last month, the little Pro-Ject makes no apologies for its compact size – and I make no apologies for featuring one of these analogue/digital miniature super-amplifiers two months running, as this is clearly where the action is in hi-fi at the moment. The Pro-ject may have rather more prosaic

## Or you could try...

The appeal of the Pro-Ject MaiA is twofold: apart from its flexibility, it has the benefit of being tiny and thus suitable for use in desktop applications. Its combination of USB input and Bluetooth makes it ideal with both computers and portable devices, and it has adequate power to drive any of the compact speakers used in a desktop set-up. But that's not to say there aren't alternatives...

#### **NAD D 3020**



The obvious rival is the NAD D 3020, reviewed last month, which also retails for £399 and has a similar spread of digital audio features, including Bluetooth and a USB input, although it lacks the ultimate

flexibility of the MaiA and doesn't have a builtin phono stage. It has an attractively easygoing sound, plenty of clout for big, dynamic music, and of course has style on its side, even if the design won't be to every taste.

#### **TEAC AI-501DA**

More conventional, but just as compact, is the little TEAC Al-501DA amplifier at £699, part of a whole range of miniature components from the Japanese manufacturer. No Bluetooth, and no phono stage, but the TEAC does have four digital inputs including asynchronous USB, exceptionally impressive build quality giving it a real 'precision-engineered' feel, and those front-panel meters reminiscent of big amplifiers of the past. The controls are smooth and precise, and this little amplifier is an absolute joy to use.



looks than the striking-looking NAD, and a little less power, but it offers rather more input flexibility (including of course that rather fine phono stage) and will be as well suited to desktop use as to the creation of a miniature hi-fi system for a smaller room. **6** 

#### REVIEW QUAD 9AS

# Active speakers that look and sound the part

Adding amplification to compact monitors for a computer audio solution

uad may be best known for its large electrostatic speakers and classic amplification components but the company has made a diverse range of products during the course of its near-80-year history, including models for professional use as well as the domestic components for which it's most famous. That professional range means the speakers we have here aren't the first active designs to bear the Quad name: even those with short memories may remember the 12L Active speakers, launched a decade ago and later joined by the smaller 11L Active, both being based on existing passive speaker designs. They were followed more recently by the 9L Active. Like those models, the 9AS, at £599 per pair, is clearly based in the same technology as Quad's excellent current L Series speakers, to the extent that the amplification and other electronics are in a separate housing mounted below the main speaker cabinets, and thus isolated from the vibrations within the speaker 'box'.

A quick bit of 'new readers start here'. A conventional speaker takes signal from an amplifier, then passes it through a crossover circuit to send the appropriate frequencies to the relevant drive unit – treble to tweeter, mid/bass to woofer and so on – to ensure those drive units are working within their limits and performing optimally. By contrast, an active speaker places the crossover circuitry upstream of the amplification; the downside is that it then requires a separate amplifier for each drive unit, the upside that the amplification can be optimised for the drive unit it powers.

In the Quad 9AS, there's a 65W amplifier for the 10cm woven Kevlar cone mid/bass unit, covering frequencies up to 2.5kHz, while a 25mm fabric dome tweeter driven by a 35W amplifier handles the higher-frequency content. The drivers are mounted in high-quality cabinets built and hand-finished in Quad parent IAG's Chinese factory, and available in a choice of black, white or ruby red high-gloss lacquer. The review pair was in the red finish, which is a dark and subtle colour, and was immaculately finished, complete with magnetic grilles.

The amplifier module offers a range of inputs, both digital and analogue: there's an asynchronous USB in, plus optical and coaxial/electric digital connectors, and analogue inputs on RCA phonos and



#### **QUAD 9AS**

Type Active two-way loudspeaker

Price £599/pr

**Drive units** 25mm fabric dome tweeter, 10cm woven Kevlar woofer

**Power** 65W mid/bass, 35W treble **Inputs** Asynchronous USB, optical and electrical digital, line-in on RCA phonos and 3.5mm stereo

**Outputs** Subwoofer, connection from

master to slave speaker

Other connections 12V trigger in/out

Accessories supplied Remote handset,
audio and trigger link cables

**Finishes** Gloss lacquer in black, white or ruby red

**Dimensions** (HxWxD) 30.2x15.2x21.5cm **quad-hifi.co.uk** 

### 'The top end stays as sweet as anyone could want, however hard you push the speakers'

a 3.5mm stereo input. A single RCA phono cable links the right-hand 'master' speaker with the left-hand 'slave' and there are outputs for a subwoofer and 12V trigger connections to allow the speakers to switch on and off in tandem (each requires its own mains input). There's also a rear-panel switch to alter the bass equalisation: as well as a flat position, there's one to boost the bass if the speakers are used in free space and a 'shelf' position for use when they're on shelves or otherwise near walls.

A touch-panel on the right speaker controls on/standby, volume and input selection, with orange tell-tale lamps for power, level and input indication, and a lightweight (and frankly very plasticky-feeling) remote control handset duplicates these functions.

#### **PERFORMANCE**

I tried the Quad speakers both on speaker stands in my main listening room, used with a conventional preamplifier, and connected directly to my Mac Mini computer on my desk, using foam studio wedges to isolate the speakers from the desktop and angle them up a little towards ear-level. Connected up – Quad supplies a single interconnect and a trigger lead to link the two speakers, a USB cable, two mains cables and a driver disc for use with the USB input and Windows computers – the speakers were left to run for a few days, as things sounded a bit tight and restrained straight from the box.

In time they loosened up and gave a clearer treble and rather faster bass, but an impression that these are rather polite, smooth-balanced speakers was borne out over extended listening. They're consistently enjoyable and make a wide range of speech and music perfectly presentable but they don't have the vitality and sheer insight offered by some rival 'monitor' designs. As a result, the sound of the Quads is perfectly suited to all-day listening but the speakers could do with shaking off some of their good manners when the music demands: dynamics are very slightly blunted, and a litte more openness and air in the high treble would help to trawl out some more ambience in high-quality live recordings.

On the plus side – and, for those who listen extensively to streaming services such as Spotify or online internet radio streams, it's a significant plus - the Quad speakers flatter lower-bitrate recordings while ensuring CDs always sound big and impressive. What's more, there's not a hint of what some hear as treble aggression in some studio monitor speakers: the top end here stays as sweet as anyone could want, however hard you push the speakers. The trade-off is that these speakers don't bring out quite as much sparkle and excitement from a higher-resolution 24-bit/192kHz recording as well as can some, which may be a drawback for a number of listeners.

For all that, the Quads look the part, in that they are less 'studio-looking' than some competing designs, are beautifully made, flexible and capable of a highly enjoyable sound. **G** 

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#### ESSAY

# If you want to relaunch a famous hi-fi name, it's obvious what you need to do - get a musician!

How a former audio engineer and accomplished jazz pianist is reviving the Technics brand



Former solo jazz pianist Michiko Ogawa is director of the Technics Project, which draws on 'skunkworks' research and adopts the styling cues of classic Technics products of the past

e're all used to the orchestrated hype of the global press conference, in which every utterance by a CEO or chief designer is met with orchestrated whoops and hollers from the faithful. However, it's rare that the appearance of a single word on a massive screen can cause an audience to erupt – yet that's exactly what happened at the end of Panasonic's massive press event at the annual IFA show in Berlin.

The lights dimmed and the single word 'Technics' appeared on the screen, greeted by a gasp and then applause. Before we knew it, we were being played live music on a grand piano: there, introducing the return of this famous hi-fi brand, was Michiko Ogawa – former Technics audio engineer, accomplished jazz pianist, and Director of the new Technics.

Ogawa started studying classical piano at the age of three, formed her own jazz band at university and plays regularly back home in Japan and overseas. Not long before travelling to Europe to launch Technics, she'd performed a programme including Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue* with the Kansai Philharmonic Orchestra in Technics' home city of Osaka, and she played both during the main Panasonic press conference at IFA and during a later Technics event, where she was joined by a German jazz quartet and veteran Japanese trumpeter Terumasa Hino.

Speaking to me the day after the big launch, the quietly spoken Ogawa explained that she'd put her performing career on the back burner when she joined Panasonic as a new graduate in 1986, only resuming her solo jazz career in 1993, and that she had also considered returning to full-time performing when Technics was wound down some years ago but was persuaded to stay with Panasonic in a senior corporate social responsibility role.

### 'We are targeting audiophiles but also ladies like me who love music but find it hard to approach the audio field'

Having been involved in significant Technics developments such as the large-diaphragm AFP1000, launched in 1988, Michiko Ogawa clearly kept in close touch with her former colleagues while Technics was out of the audio game. Asked about that time, she explains that during the time dominated by MP3 music the Technics brand 'ran out of steam and was wound up'.

So then what happened? She laughs and says that what was going on during the 'dark' period was an informal process of investigation and development, some of it around sound quality for Blu-ray players, and about three years' work on refining digital amplifiers – 'a skunkworks operation' is how she describes it.

'In other words, we had already accumulated the necessary technologies required for reproducing high-resolution audio, and around autumn 2012, and based around Tetsuya Itani, several audio engineers who cared intensely about sound began to come together to have intensive discussions about how to build on the Technics heritage.'

At the same time, there was a move to redefine Panasonic's audio business, and the Technics project was officially sanctioned in August 2013. Ogawa became involved earlier this year, due to her previous engineering work and her research into the psychoacoustics of listeners' emotional response to music. She says that the reason for the re-emergence of Technics now is all to do with the wider availability of high-resolution music, especially in Japan, and a return to consumers wanting to take music seriously, and to listen to music rather than just 'having it on'.

She explains that while the R1 Reference System is pitched at the audiophile market, with the C700 – and perhaps forthcoming systems at even more affordable prices – 'we are targeting not only audiophiles but music lovers like me - ladies - who love music but find it hard to approach the audio field. I especially would like to expand this kind of product to female buyers.' But she acknowledges that Technics - and in particular the R1 system - is going to be a hard sell, both into dealers and to consumers, and her colleagues add that the company is selecting dealers, 'one by one', who are able to support and explain products at this level.

The philosophy of new Technics is simple, though, and summed up by the slogan 'Rediscover Music'. Ogawa explains that 'we grow up repeatedly discovering and being moved by new types of music. However, as we get older we get distracted by all the things going on in our lives and perhaps misplace the pure love of music.

"Through the new Technics products we are striving to offer listeners the feeling of "rediscovering music", by helping them to have such uniquely emotionally engaging experiences – ones that we seem to have lost."







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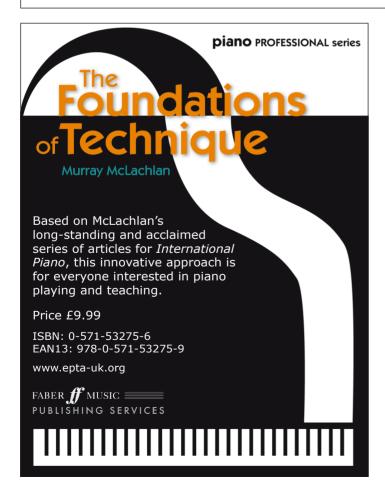


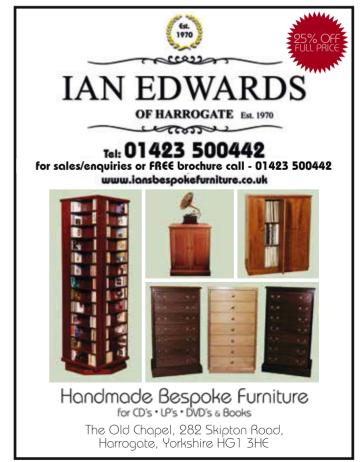






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# NOTES & LETTERS

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Write to us at Gramophone, Mark Allen Group, St. Jude's Church, Dulwich Road, London SE24 oPB or gramophone@markallengroup.com

#### Forgotten work with narrator?

Your contributor Gavin Dixon lists 10 'works with narrator' (Specialist's Guide, September) yet fails to mention the most moving piece of this kind – Vaughan Williams's An Oxford Elegy – or the most viscerally exciting – Walton's (arr Palmer) Henry V: A Shakespeare Scenario, heard at the BBC Proms this year. Geoffrey Atkinson, via email

#### Don't forget Igor Oistrakh!

After listening to yet another new recording of the Tchaikovsky Violin Concerto in D major, I'm wondering: why has nobody reissued one of the finest interpretations of all? I'm thinking of Igor Oistrakh's recording with the Moscow Philharmonic Orchestra (with his father David Oistrakh conducting). Issued as a vinyl LP from Melodiya/ Angel (12/72), it's superb. Those of us fortunate enough to own LPs must be wondering whether we should wear them out further, but I've yet to find a CD version of this recording. Anne Thackray Toronto, Canada

### Championing the underdogs

Why are great contemporaries of Haydn and Beethoven left out in the cold, both on disc and in concert? Beethoven and Ries were great friends, but the world has taken little notice of Ries's output. CPO and Naxos have done their best with him, as well as with Reinecke, Henselt, Dussek, Pierne, Myaskovsky and Scharwenka, but the bigger labels have made very little effort to bring these great composers to life. Ignace Erauw, via email



Igor Oistrakh: the finest Tchaikovsky recording?

# Letter of the Month



'Truly great': Georges Prêtre's account of Strauss's Also Sprach Zarathustra should not be overlooked

## Is Prêtre behind the best Zarathustra?

Your *Also Sprach Zarathustra* overview (Collection, Awards) surprisingly omitted a disc I cherish from the Selected Discography. I refer to the account by Georges Prêtre and the Philharmonia on RCA.

Here's what an American reviewer wrote of it back in the 1990s: 'In 1974 RCA was under intense pressure to issue a *Zarathustra* which could compete with those of Karajan and

several others. So what did they do? They hired Georges Prêtre and the best orchestra in England and produced a truly great recording.'

Of the many fine recordings in my collection – Reiner, Karajan '73, Previn, Haitink, van Steen – the Prêtre/Philharmonia remains my favourite in both performance and sound. Maybe I'll try the new Nelsons... *John Hartsfield, Alabama, USA* 

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PRESTÖ

### Chicago razzle-dazzles 'em

Having read online your 'world's greatest orchestras' feature (originally printed in the December 2008 issue), I had to write to you. After hearing Haitink conduct Mahler's Fourth at the BBC Proms recently, and having heard him many times with the Concertgebouw and Chicago, I have to say that no orchestra really stands up to Chicago. Of course, the LSO is magnificent, and I love the Concertgebouw; I've heard the Berlin and

Vienna Philharmonics too, many times. All that said, though, there's just no orchestra better than Chicago. *Tony Pope, via email* 

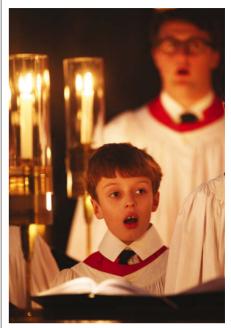
#### Editorial notes

Regarding the obituary of Peter Sculthorpe (Awards issue), Wadham College is of course in Oxford, not Cambridge.

On page 101 of the Awards issue, we incorrectly captioned a picture of vocal group Stile Antico as La Nuova Musica.

# GRAMOPHONE AT FOYLES Sir James Galway in conversation **December 11** Join Gramophone's 2014 Lifetime Achievement Award winner, the great flautist Sir James Galway on Thursday, December 11 at 7pm. He'll be talking to Gramophone's Editor-in-Chief, James Jolly, about his glittering career and the many musical partnerships he has enjoyed. A selection of Sir James's recordings will be available to purchase and to have signed. Tickets are £5, available in advance at es.co.uk/events, and everyone attending has the chance to win a copy of RCA Red Seal's new 73-disc set 'James Galway. The Man with the Golden Flute', generously donated by Sony Classical. Foyles, 107 Charing Cross Road, **London WC2H ODT** FOYLES foyles.co.uk/events gramophone.co.uk/foyles

# NEXT MONTH DECEMBER 2014



# Who's writing the best Christmas choral music?

Ivan Moody explores the most innovative and inspiring choral music being written for the festive season

## Baroque specialist William Christie: still going strong at 80

The American-born French conductor on his latest recording with ensemble Les Art Florissants

## Reappraising Berlioz's L'enfance du Christ

Geoffrey Norris surveys the catalogue for the best recordings of this seasonal choral masterpiece

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David Puttnam

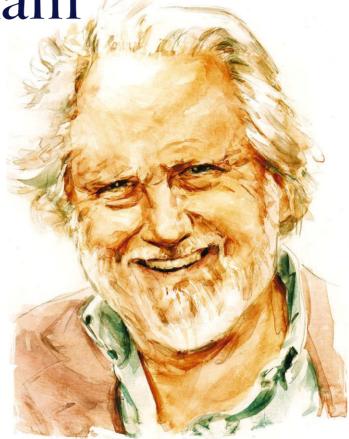
The producer of films including Chariots of Fire and Memphis Belle on how he discovered classical music

was very much a rock'n'roll kid of the late '50s and early '60s, but in 1964 I was sent by the advertising agency I worked for to New York. The first night I was there, because of jet lag, I found myself in an all-night record store called Colony Music. The place was deserted and the guy behind the counter said, 'What kind of music do you like?' We got into a conversation, and he said, 'Do you like classical music?' I said, 'No, no, it's not for me'. And he said, 'Well, I think you would, looking at what you are buying. I'll tell you what we'll do – when are you coming back?' I said a couple of months' time. So he said, 'I'm going to give you four albums, and all I ask is that if you don't like them, bring them back, and if you do like them, pay me – but I do want to know which ones you like and in what order.'

I remember exactly what they were: Vivaldi concertos, Wagner overtures, a Bartók record and Mozart's horn concertos. I very quickly fell in love with the overtures, I developed a real liking for the Vivaldi and I liked the Mozart, but couldn't get on with the Bartók. I went back two months later to thank him, and he asked which order I liked them in. I told him I really didn't like the Bartók, and he said, 'I knew you wouldn't – I was testing you! If you'd come back and told me you did, I'd have known you were lying!' He then gave me four more records to listen to. That relationship went on for maybe three years – each time I went to New York he gave me four albums. And then I went back one day and he'd gone, and I never ever saw him again. But what became a profound lifelong love was started in New York, in that shop, that evening in August in 1964.

When making films, choosing the composer was one of the responsibilities I really used to cling on to as mine. I would also make a commitment to a composer at script stage – in 95 per cent of movies the decision on the composer is made when the film is being shot, or even has been shot. My theory is that I could hear what the music should be in my head when I was reading the script – and it was only when I ceased to feel I could do that that I basically retired from the film industry, because I knew that one of the assets, one of the things I felt I could do, was beginning to leave me.

When I read the script to *The Killing Fields*, one of the things that was very evident from very early on was the way equipment wiped out people. In some senses it was a triumph of mechanism over humanity. I wanted someone to score the film who could reflect that. I remember being very impressed with *Tubular* 



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THE RECORD I COULDN'T LIVE WITHOUT

**Lauridsen** Lux aeterna **Polyphony / Layton** Hyperion (© CDA67449 (4/05) Lauridsen is the same age as me, and I just love the idea that someone's writing music with that degree of beauty, who's my age. I find it reassuring.

Bells when it first came out, and I tracked down Mike Oldfield and asked him. What I think is really brilliant in Mike's music is illustrated if you look at two sequences. The helicopter evacuation sequence is very mechanical, rhythmic – 'clang, clang, clang' – which if you've listened to Tubular Bells you know would have been food and drink to him. But then you've got the evacuation of the city, which is a flat-out big 'Sanctus'. And you really have to take your hat off to someone who can work across that spread. Morricone is like that. He knows brilliantly how to serve what is happening on the screen.

If movies had been invented 100 years earlier I actually think that one of the great movie composers would have been without doubt Richard Wagner, who I think would have absolutely grabbed this medium and seen how extraordinary it could be. If I find myself in heaven and I'm offered a wish list, I'm going to ask to do a movie written by Charles Dickens and scored by Richard Wagner. •

'Puttnam plays Puttnam', a disc of music from Puttnam's films, arranged and played by his son Sacha Puttnam – is out on Decca



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